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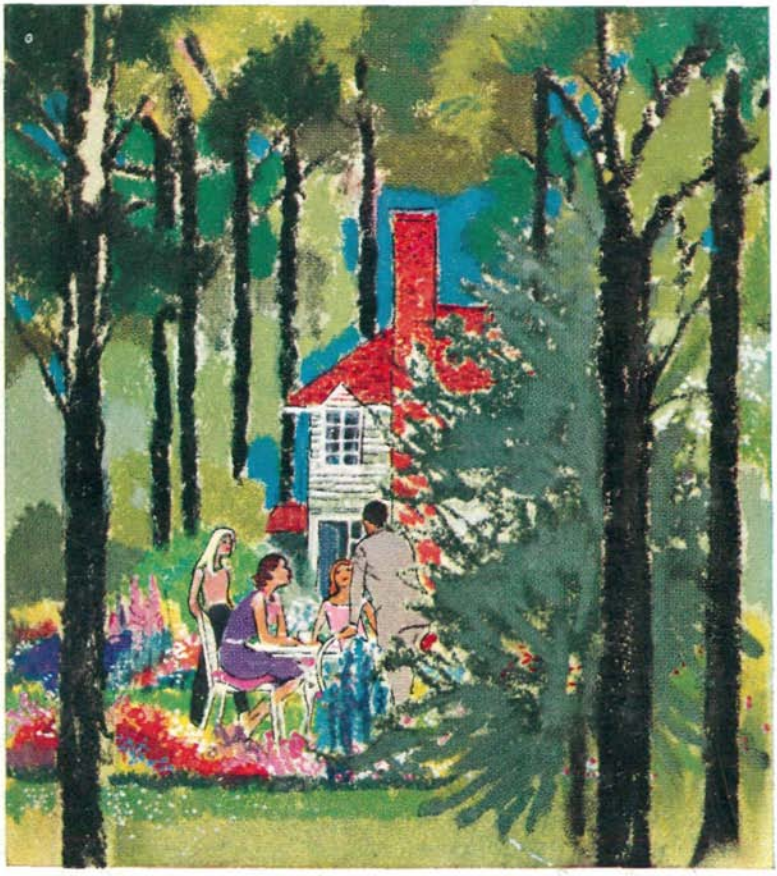

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BY TOM MACDONALD

CRY OF THE CURLEW

GWEN MEREDITH was leaning on the crooked gate which opened into the apron cemetery which hugged the box of a chapel, and she shrugged away her thoughts. Tut, tut, what would a girl be doing with thinking of death? She had always thought that the chapel was ugly, but she had only to lift her eyes to the mountain to see it green and warm in the golden afternoon. She had only to look down the valley to see how comely it was, and know that the Ystwyth was always singing through its heart. The river was true to its name—swift.

Pity the cuckoos had gone, for they sang lovely in the peat, the notes carrying far in the silences. But the swallows, white-bellied, were still there, nesting under the eaves of the chapel. They were feeding their young. Some day soon they would all fly back to Africa. The sparrows would stay. She could hear them gossiping in the yard behind her. They always stayed.

But she only had to look in the mirror, as she had done just now, to know that she was no drab mountain sparrow. She was a swallow—the blue sheen in her black hair, the face as brown as an egg, the eyes with the bloom of plums. She reached out her arms to the swallows. "Take me to Africa," she whispered. Then she laughed. What a silly thing to think of. She was tied to the mountain.

It was Sunday now and there was no service at all in the chapel. If there were, there might be the chance that a young man with God's light in his eyes would be the preacher. But

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that, too, was a dream. "Young men," Dafydd, her father, had said, "too few there are now to preach about the Good Shepherd." There was a service now only once a month, when a lay preacher came the ten miles up the mountain to preach to no more than half-a-dozen, including herself and her father. Most times the preacher was an old man and old-fashioned.

The gate sagged as she pushed it open. She stood by the small, grey stone that marked her mother's grave... *Catrin Meredith, loving wife of Dafydd Meredith of Glanystwyth.* She had died when she was twenty-seven. It was on a winter's night in a blinding snow storm. She had died before the doctor could reach the farm and Dafydd was left with Gwen, his only child. The Lord gives and the Lord takes, said the cold message, in Welsh, on the stone.

All the other Merediths who were slotted in the earth of the mountain meant nothing to her. They were only names. But like them, she and her father belonged to the mountain. He used to say they were as fixed as any of the crags, for the Merediths had been there since Owain Glyn Dwr had set up the last Welsh parliament in Machynlleth and defied the English kings.

She knew of her father's fret that no young man would come and desert the world for a shepherd's farm tucked under the shoulder of the mountain. He was somewhere on the mountain now, rounding sheep with the collies, Fanny and Jack. He gave his whole life to a lowland farmer's sheep. He

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loved sheep. In early spring the kitchen would be crowded with many orphan lambs and he handled them like babies. An anthropologist from Aberystwyth had said that Dafydd Meredith was the last of the pure Celts—lean, slight, vivid and dark as a Welsh cake, he was. People said that he and his daughter had the same dreamy eyes, that they seemed to have stepped out of a Celtic twilight.

Gwen walked down the field where the hay had been cut. Bees burred in the meadow. The sky was a-shiver with larks. She would sit by the river. It would be something to talk to, where its voice was loud in the gorge.

Then she saw a man fishing at the lip of the gorge. He was on the Meredith side of the river. She gave a swift glance to the mountain. There wasn't a sign of her father. If he saw the stranger he would come leaping down with the dogs, and he would roast the man with his tongue for fishing on the Sabbath.

One man who had come fishing on a Sunday had laughed in Dafydd's face. Dafydd had hammered him in Welsh, for he had little English. The man went on chuckling and fishing. Dafydd had wrenched the rod from his hands and in the struggle the man had fallen into the river.

Now she must warn the stranger, and she could see he was watching her coming. His line dangled. He met her with a warm smile.

She blushed and said: "Sir, it's something you can't be allowed to be doing here, breaking the holiness of the Sunday."

"Why not?" he asked. "The Lord made this river and he hasn't objected."

"Running this river is through our fields, sir."

"I'm sorry. It seems I should have asked for permission, then?"

"On a Sunday, never would you get it."

"You sound like a preacher's daughter."

"No, it's a shepherd's daughter I am."

"And your name?"

"Gwen Meredith, it is."

"It's a lovely name," he said, and he saw she was soft and round like a bird and her nose was cockled with freckles.

She was appraising him, too. Slight and dark and he smiled with his eyes.

"Why on earth should a girl like you be living on a lonely mountain?" he asked.

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"My home it is. I was born in the little farm over there."

"And you're—well, yes—about eighteen."

"Yes, sir, but how would you be knowing?"

"It's written all over you. Have you ever been away from the mountain?"

"Only to the other side when to school I was going."

"Is that why you speak English?"

She nodded. "But Dafydd, my father, only speaks the Welsh."

"Good lord."

"What is so funny about that?"

"Nothing, of course. Say something in Welsh."

"For you to laugh at me?"

He frowned. "Of course not. But you're shy, shy as a mountain hare." Again the swift smile.

She then warned him that her father mustn't catch him. She told him about the man who had been thrown into the river.

"Your father is tough, then?"

"He's the last of the true Celts," she said.

She bridled when he asked her to sit down.

"No," she said. She scoured the mountain with quick looks. "My father will be coming home and he'll be wanting his tea."

"Invite me to tea, then."

"With that fishing-rod?"

"I'll throw it into the river," and as he was about to make the gesture, she stayed his hand.

"It's too expensive to be throwing it away like that," she said.

"We'll leave it here then, while we go to tea," he said.

"My father, he'll be knowing you are fishing. What is it you do when you're not fishing?"

"I'm a writer."

"Books?"

"Yes."

"Where you come from?"

"South Africa."

"Oh." There was no mistaking the flash in her eyes.

"Why are you so surprised?"

"Is it where my swallows fly at the end of summer?"

"Could be, but then I've never heard swallows twitter in Welsh."

The sight of Dafydd on the mountain cut her laugh in half.

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"There is my father," she said.

"I can't see him. What eyes you must have."

She pointed, but he couldn't see the man.

"I can see the dogs, too," she said.

"Shall I meet them at tea?"

"No."

"I'm so thirsty."

"Let me go first, then. Stay you here, hiding that old rod. Then later you call."

She hurried away.

He watched the mountain and saw the man and the dogs. They were coming down swiftly. He could wait and walk leisurely to meet them at the farm.

He had made friends with the dogs before Dafydd came. Now there he was with his face dark with menace. The same eyes as Gwen's, the same mystery at the back of them, dreamy.

"What you want?" The words came like a stab.

"A cup of tea, Mr. Meredith."

"My name, why?"

"I met your daughter."

Dafydd looked bewildered for a moment. It was as if they had met before. He wanted to challenge him about fishing, but it came to him suddenly that he didn't want to be angry.

Gwen came running from the house and she called in Welsh: "Tea's ready, Dada. You'd better invite the stranger to have a cup."

"Yes indeed, Gwen *fach*. He's invited himself, that I can see."

"You're invited," she said, as he and her father joined her. "But not told me your name you have, sir."

"It's John," he said.

"But what else?"

"I'll call you Gwen and you'll call me John. That'll do nicely."

The kitchen had an old Welsh dresser furnished with an array of plates, from small ones to a tremendous one. Lustre jugs hung from hooks. There was a faint glow in the peat fire. There was a table with four chairs. In the corner by the fire there was an old leather chair and an oak settle. The house was as quiet as its old furniture.

"A fire of peat," John said.

"One of the last on the mountain," she said.

"And the lovely set of jugs," he said. "Lustre, eh?"

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"The people who call, they are few," she said, "but strangers do be liking the lustre jugs. Every Welsh cottage used to be having them in plenty. No," she said, wiping the suspicion from her father's face, "he's not after the lustre jugs. He's a writer."

Dafydd laughed. "Then tell him I've only read one book and the only book worth reading—the Bible."

Gwen told John, and John said that to a point he agreed with Dafydd about the Bible.

Dafydd put his cup and saucer on the knee of his corduroy trousers.

"Where does the stranger come from, Gwen *fach*?"

"Africa."

"By the grace of the big God, that's a long way."

Gwen smiled at John. "Excusing us you will be for talking the Welsh. My father is asking some questions about you."

"Well, tell him the truth."

"What truth?" Her head jerked and she flung back her hair.

"That you liked me the moment you saw me by the river."

"There's cheeky you are."

"What's he cheeky about?" asked Dafydd. Cheeky was an English word that had crept into Welsh.

"Oh, he was just saying, Dada, that we like him."

"That is true, Gwen, but for what reason?"

"I wouldn't know."

The bread was of dark barley and plastered with yellow butter; it tasted like no bread John had ever known. Who made the bread? Gwen said that she did. Yes, she churned the butter, but that was another thing that was passing away on the mountain farms.

"I'd like to churn butter with you," said John.

"You've never churned a pound of butter in your life."

"Well no. What do you do?"

"Just turn the handle of the old churn."

"But I could do that."

"No butter shall I be making for many days."

Dafydd watched them and he was pleased at what he saw. It reminded him of the way he had talked with Catrin.

"Gwen," said John, "let your father tell me why he lives on the mountain. In Welsh, of course. You'll translate?"

"Why?"

"Didn't I tell you I'm a writer? I like to know what people

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think. But here's a world that's very much shut for me, because of the language. Your father looks like a poet."

"That he is. He writes verses."

"Tell him to talk about the mountain."

Dafydd was happy to do so. The mountain, he said, was never lonely, because it brimmed with life. For the tarns were clear enough to see your face in. The crying of the curlews carried all the sorrows of the world. The hawks hung in the air as if they were on invisible wires. The time came when the lambs flowered the mountain. Not that the mountain lacked blossom. The wonder of it all lay in the heather when a million bees bothered the blossom. Days of summer, honey-gold, he said. And the times when his heart was full of peace —when the valley below was a vast dish of lark-song. But more than anything, he said, peace was timeless on the mountain.

But what happened in the winter? asked John, through Gwen.

Then, said Dafydd, he folded the sheep to him. He made it a winter of content by the friendliest of all fires, the peat fire. By the light of the lamp he read the Great Book and wandered with the prophets.

And to what end? asked John.

The mountain, said Dafydd, was a little closer than any other place to the everlasting stars.

"Tell him, Gwen *fach*," said Dafydd, "to come back when the cuckoos call and we'll give him a bowl of cuckoo song with his breakfast."

Dafydd waited for John to laugh, but he saw that he was impressed.

"That is beautiful," said John. "Poetry."

"Yes," said Gwen, "it is in one of his songs."

Dafydd wanted to know where John was going.

"Nowhere," he told Gwen. He had left his car in a village way down in the valley. "Bitty-something, they call it," he said.

"Ysbytty Ystwyth," she said.

"Sounds something like that," said John.

Gwen told her father. "It's a long way to go back," he said. "Ask him if he will be staying the night. Tell him that though the place looks small, there are three bedrooms."

Yes, he would stay.

"Tell him," said Dafydd, "that it will be so quiet that he'll sleep like a baby."

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Gwen called the two cows to the milking and they came with swinging udders. John watched her playing on the teats as if they were a piano, and the song of the milk tinkled in the pail. She leaned her head against the cow's flank and said: "Never will I know why my father took to a stranger like he took to you."

"Perhaps I know."

The song of the milking stopped. "For why?"

"We'll see."

"Why do you be staying?"

"I've been thinking, I'd like to go up the mountain with your father in the morning to see the dogs working. Davyd is a remarkable man."

She laughed softly. "No foreigner can pronounce the double *d* in the Welsh."

Now she had a high colour, and she wasn't the half-shy child who had come to him down by the river. She seemed to have had a sudden blossoming. But any man might have come into her loneliness and set her blood racing.

When she had taken the milk to the house she said that he and her father should go out so that she could prepare the supper.

"You try to speak English," she told her father.

"Sometimes people can understand one another in silences," he said.

They went into the little cemetery and there was no need for Dafydd to tell him that it was the graveyard of the Merediths. He opened the chapel door with an enormous key. The air was fusty and there were cobwebs in the high corners. Dafydd floundered in English, but with the help of gestures he told John enough to make him understand that the old pulpit was made of the small oak trees of the valley. So were the austere benches. It was the chapel of shepherds.

They stood together in the twilight, the backbone of the mountain an uninterrupted line, and the voice of the river came to them.

Dafydd tried to explain to him that he and Gwen belonged to the mountain.

She called them and they sat down to supper. Then they talked late into the night, Gwen interpreting. The dogs lay on the hearth, twitching in their sleep. John told them that he came from Natal where the hills were shawled with green sugar-cane. He talked about the big, laughing Zulus. Dafydd

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was alert. Had John ever been to Isandhlwana? He pronounced the name well.

"What would you be knowing about it?" asked John.

Dafydd said he knew it was a battlefield where the Zulus had wiped out a large force of British soldiers, who were mostly Welsh. A great-uncle of his had died there, one Alun Meredith, who was a drummer-boy. A brother of Alun's had later gone to South Africa to find his grave, and had never come back.

"But I thought that all the Merediths had to stay here?" said John.

"Not all," said Gwen, translating the slow speech of Dafydd. "But there always had to be one son left for to be a shepherd."

"Until now," said John.

"Until now," she said.

"Then ask your father what he's going to do now that he hasn't a son to follow in his footsteps."

"I can't ask him that," she said quickly.

"Come on, Gwen *fach*," said Dafydd. "I think I caught some of the drift of what he was saying. Trouble with the people who talk English is that they be swallowing their words."

"You understand more than you let on, Dada," she said.

She told him what John had said.

"Then tell him that I expect a miracle," said Dafydd, "that the man who will marry you will bring you a rare dowry—a love big enough to make him happy with a mountain. Hold on, now." He held up a hand. "How shall you put it?"

"You know I couldn't put it that way at all, Dada."

"But it's all hypothetical, my child. Anyhow, you haven't had time to fall in love with him."

"How did you fall in love with my mother?"

"I told you many times. I saw her once and I was lost."

On a note of triumph, she said, "So you see, Dada."

"What, Gwen *fach*?"

"That it happens."

"Oh, is it as bad as that? But you go and tell him what I said, that when I'm buried with my people here, the shepherd's crook will fall into your hands."

She told John.

"But what do you really know about sheep?" he mocked.

"I was brought up with them," she said.

He nodded towards the dogs. "Can you work them—I mean work them like your father?"

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"Of course." She looked across at a small glass cabinet where a row of silver cups glinted.

"Some of those cups there I won at the sheep-dog trials," she said.

"Good God, and I thought you were just a pretty milkmaid," he said.

She flew up the narrow stairs and brought back a scrap book. She laid it on the table and John turned the pages.

"Your pictures and all," he said.

"Yes, but you be reading that piece there," and she put her fingernail on a report.

"They say you might yet be the first girl to win the national in Wales. What's that?"

"The prize at the national sheep-dog trials. But my father says he's going to train me so hard I'll be entering for the international. That's been a kind of monastery to the men. No woman has ever entered yet."

"Wonderful," he said.

Dafydd was the first to yawn. He said that life began at cock-crow because he'd have to see if the mountain foxes had been among the flocks.

They went upstairs by candlelight. Gwen showed John to his room and he had to stoop to avoid the low ceiling.

"I'm going to kiss you goodnight," he said, and as she held her hands up against him, he took them in his own and kissed her. They said goodnight. He heard her pass through her father's room. Dafydd's room was between them.

The mists still clung to the morning when he awakened. Dafydd and Gwen were already up. At breakfast, Dafydd said he wouldn't be going up the mountain, but Gwen would go with the dogs. He said he wanted John to see how she handled the sheep and the dogs.

The dogs barked and leapt before them as they took the path. Gwen took the stepping stones over bog-land easily, while he floundered. The white light began swathing the mountain. The first larks were dropping like jewels from the sky.

And Gwen, thought John, *was* the morning. Only a deeper rose in her cheeks showed that she had been climbing at all, while his breath came in gasps on the mountain-top as he choked on a cigarette.

The dogs looked up into her face. She shaded her eyes with her hand and saw where the flanks of the mountain were

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white with sheep. She sent Jack off to the right. Fanny was restless until she sent her off to the left. The dogs went out of sight . . . She gave the sharp whistle of the lapwing. From one side and then from the other the dogs herded. The sheep came running. Sharper and sharper came her whistle—*pee-wit!* She called the dogs to a halt with a flute like a blackbird's. The sheep came on, driven by the dogs.

"How many bird-calls have you in your throat?" asked John.

"I never counted them, you know," she said. She trilled. "That's a lark," she said. She gave the mournful cry of the curlew, the whistle of a snipe, the stutter of a robin. "I think I can give the call of all the mountain birds," she said. She called: "*Cuck-oo*," and the call went bubbling down the valley.

From the mountain he watched the colours, silver and tobacco-leaf, and everywhere the faint rose of heather.

"Last night, no foxes came," she said.

"How do you know?"

"The sheep, they are not wild this morning. You see, nothing was disturbing them last night."

"How would you know?"

"They are easy with the dogs, you see."

"You're marvellous."

She flicked her eyes over the passing parade of the sheep. She sat beside him and the dogs lay near them, their pink tongues hanging. The sheep browsed peacefully, their tails flicking. He tousled the head of Fanny and played with the silk of her ears.

She smiled. "Just a mountain girl I am," she said. "My happiest time it is when we save the orphan lambs. I was a little bit of a girl when I had some lambs in bed with me. I used to sing them to sleep."

"Do lambs like music?"

"Love it, they do. Lamb's wool against my cheek. There's lovely it is."

He took her hand.

"Have you ever been to a city?"

"No, only I've been to the little town of Aberystwyth."

"I was there the other day. Chapels all over the place."

"Wales, it is a land of chapels," she said.

"You love this mountain."

"Yes indeed."

"But you can't give it your life."

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Her forehead wrinkled. "Why not?"

"You're young. You should see the world."

"But the mountain, big enough it is."

"You know every crease of it."

She nodded. "But a man from the town, he couldn't live here. My father is often saying the mountain would kill a man from the town." She loosened her hand. "Come on, now. There's lunch I'll be preparing," and then, slyly, "before you go."

She got up, but he sat on and looked up at her. "Are you going to grow old and die here, Gwen?"

"Yes, indeed. The last I am of the Merediths. I'll sit, waiting. Perhaps some day a shining knight he will come riding by, like in the story book."

"You're teasing me."

"Am I indeed, now?"

He reached up a hand. "Help me up with that mountain strength of yours."

She gave him a hand.

He put his arm round her shoulder and pointed to the scribble of the river before it fell into the gorge.

"Of course, I could go fishing," he said.

"Oh," she said, "we left your rod by the river last night."

"So we did, but I'm a poor fisherman."

"But that rod now, it must have cost a lot of money."

"You'd be such a frugal wife. I think you'd starve me."

"Does my father look indeed as if that is so?"

"Don't be vexed."

"Vexed I am not, but that fishing-rod, you are not going to leave it by there?"

"Of course not. We'll go for it now."

They ran down the mountain together, but she was the more sure-footed and he took a tumble when his foot caught in a hole. His ankle wrenched, and she turned round to see him nursing his shoe.

"Oh," she said, as she reached him, "my fault it is."

"That's nonsense," he said angrily. "I was clumsy."

"But how could you be knowing there were old rabbit holes around?" She unlaced his shoe. "Now put your teeth altogether," she said, and she gave the shoe a quick tug. He squirmed, feeling that his foot had come off. Tenderly she slipped off the sock.

The ankle was already turning blue.

"Now you can't walk," she said.

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"Of course I can." He tried to rise, but as soon as the hurt foot touched the ground he collapsed with the pain.

"I'll have to fetch my pony, Bess," she said.

"I didn't know you had a pony, but how can I get on a pony's back?"

"Easy," she said. She called: "Bess, Bess." Her voice was like a bugle.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Down beyond the bog," she said. "You wait now."

Then he heard the far-off whinny of a horse. Within minutes he saw her with her tail in the wind. The dogs went to meet her, turned and came, barking, on either side of her. The pony came up to them and nuzzled Gwen. She was small with a ragged coat, "Because we are not using her much," explained Gwen.

Gwen spoke to Bess in Welsh and the pony went down on her knees.

"I think I'll be able to sidle on her back," he said.

He did so with Gwen's help. Thus he came riding home and they saw Dafydd framed in the doorway. He hurried when he saw them. When he was told that it was only a twist of the ankle, his concern vanished. They got John into a chair.

Gwen turned to her father and told him about the fishing-rod. Could she go and fetch it?

Dafydd said he had fetched it while they were on the mountain. "I had seen him fishing, all right," he said.

"And you didn't want to throw him in the river for fishing on Sunday?"

"No, indeed. It was wrong of me to lose my temper that last time, Gwen *fach*." He laughed as he looked at John. "Perhaps John there would have turned the tables on me if I had tried."

"You're even glad that he's sprained his ankle?"

"Come to think of it, I am indeed."

They joined in a laugh.

"What is there to laugh about?" asked John sourly.

"It was my father telling me that he saw you fishing and he didn't want to pitch you into the river," said Gwen.

"Tell him I'll have to stay a while now."

"He knows that."

"Tell him that I'm going to take you to see your great-great-uncle's grave at Isandhlwana."

Dafydd cocked his head.

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John fixed him hard with his eyes. "Now Dafydd," he said. "I'll speak slowly, so slowly that you'll understand. My name is John Meredith."

"*Duw, Duw*," said Dafydd. Then he said, in English, "A relation you is."

"Tell him, Gwen," said John, "and you'd better put it in Welsh. I found some old newspapers belonging to my great-great-grandfather—the brother of Alun, the drummer-boy. Some old letters from a sister of his, from that bitty place down by the river. So I came here out of curiosity."

Her voice fell. "So you're my cousin, then?"

"So far removed that it doesn't matter. Will you come with me to Isandhlwana?"

"The name's like a song," she said.

"Like a song it is," stumbled Dafydd in English. "Isandhlwana."

"I'm going to tell the swallows," she said, as she ran out.

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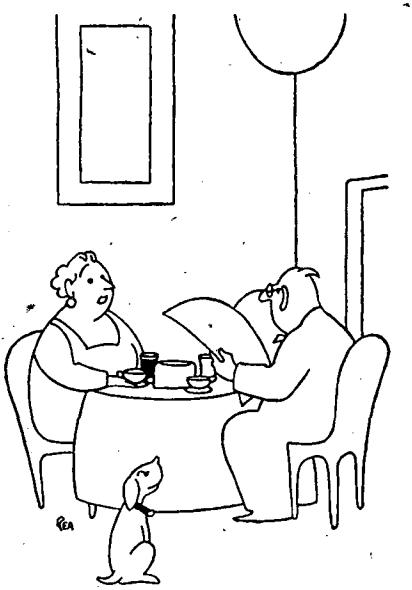

"I asked you a question, Charles. Yesterday."

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BY JAMES LEASOR

Seventy-Sixth Face

Dr. Jason Love, amateur agent extraordinary, turns up in Holland as a sophisticated tourist—but gets involved with yet another crime

OUTSIDE, in the *château* gardens, the fountains threw patriotic arms of red, white and blue—Holland's national colours—sixty feet nearer the dark of the sky. The changing breeze blew a faint spray on Dr. Jason Love's face as he sat on the terrace. The scent of pine trees lay sweet as syrup on the soft midnight air.

This was his first visit to Holland; the luxury of this *château* converted into a country hotel impressed him. Its barbered lawns, striped awnings, the richness of waxed Dutch furniture, provided an unexpected obverse to the anticipated trinity of tulip fields, windmills and canals.

He glanced at Angela across the white wrought-iron table. Was this different from the clog-image she had also absorbed at school? But then Max's daughter was barely nineteen. At that age one knew everyone and everything; the only unknown experience was death, and that lay far away.

The band changed tempo. The beat of *Amapola*, a song half forgotten, half unforgettable, spun his mind back across the years to another night when he had heard it first with Angela's father, a wartime surgeon with the US Army Air Force in Calcutta, flying on the Hump run to Chungking.

The song completed the circle, for Angela, Love's god-daughter, was on a two-week tour of European capitals with a party from her college. And Love, on his way back to his Somerset practice from an early holiday in Antibes, had driven north to Amsterdam to meet her. The moonlight glittered on his white 812 supercharged Cord roadster under the trees;

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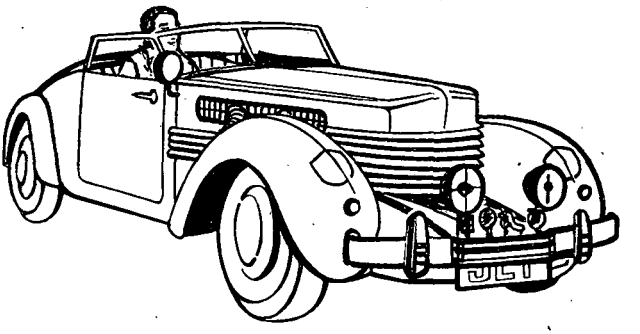

like the song, it was a beautiful anachronism of the nineteen thirties. This was Angela's last evening; she was all but on her way. Love hated *goodbyes*...

As he sat there, he recalled the parting words of Colonel Douglas MacGillivray, Deputy Head of D.I.6., the British Overseas Intelligence network for whom he sometimes acted as an amateur agent, before he left for France.

They had been talking in the back room of the travel agency off the Edgware Road through which Love had booked his tickets, but which existed primarily as a convenient cover for Intelligence activities, for constant overseas telegrams, departures and arrivals at unlikely hours. He still had in his jacket pocket the slim aluminium cigarette lighter that MacGillivray had placed on the desk between them.

"One of our newest electronic gadgets, Doctor," the Colonel had announced proudly. "Helps us to cut down on manpower—and on risks. Observe how the business of spying is changing: to save sending a man over the Wall, for instance, we tapped East German underground telephone-cables. But someone talked, and the scheme was blown.

"The electronic boys thought again, and produced a scheme to transmit messages over the Wall along an infra-red beam. Then someone else decided that this could be deflected, so we substituted the laser—a brief flash of light and the message was finished, received and understood. Over and out.

"These changes made us realise how old-fashioned we were

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in other ways. Have you ever thought, Doctor, that although between this century's two key assassinations—at Sarajevo in 1914 and at Dallas in 1963—the world's seen more scientific progress than possibly over the previous five hundred years, yet the means—the bullet—was precisely the same?

"Now this side of the business is also coming up-to-date—and rapidly. When de Gaulle visited St. Hermine in Vendee province in France this spring, for example, OAS extremists planned to murder him from a distance. The killer would be a hundred yards away with a tiny gadget in his pocket like the one I've got here. Nothing to link him with the killing at all.

"It's a midget transmitter that could explode by radio a bomb hidden inside an ornamental vase near the General. Luckily, someone talked, so the plan never went into action. But it set the scientific wallahs thinking and they've worked out some ingenious variations on the theme.

"Anyhow, have this for free. You can adapt it to open your garage doors from a distance if you want—it can be tuned to any VHF waveband.

"Where are you off to? France and Holland? Well, we'll set it to the Dutch police's wavelength—I don't know the French frequency, it's just been changed."

MacGillivray turned a tiny screw-head in the base with the point of a nail-file.

"There. That should bring a policeman along in double quick time if you break down in that old Cord of yours. It'll send out a constant signal on their emergency waveband until you switch it off. So."

"Anything happening in your line in Holland?" Love asked dutifully, as he slipped the lighter-radio into his pocket.

MacGillivray shrugged evasively. "Not much, but there's been a bit of commotion elsewhere, although it's more Interpol stuff than ours.

"Fellow got away with fifty-thousand pounds worth of diamonds in Cannes last week. Week before that, roughly the same amount of sparklers went in Rome. Week before that, Athens.

"Each time, the women who'd lost the stuff were dining out. Expect their husbands will have a job charging *that* up to expenses..."

Expenses. The word was a helm to turn Love's thoughts back to the present. The bill; he should ask for it soon. As he glanced around for a waiter the band played a fanfare, all

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horns, desert music. A compère wearing a nightclub tan, a white dinner jacket, held up both hands for silence.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, first in English, repeating himself in French, in Dutch. "We proudly present to you, for this evening only, the greatest illusionist in Europe, who leaves Amsterdam tonight on a tour of the United States.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you—*Turkoman.*"

A roll of drums as he gave them Turkoman. The name seemed faintly familiar. Then Love remembered. He had seen him billed during the previous week at one of the open-air clubs on the coast road between Nice and Cannes.

A thickly-built man with hair black as a raven's wing, a flat Slavonic face, stepped through the French doors on to the terrace. A spotlight flickered from the roof and held him. Turkoman raised both hands above his head. From the left sleeve of his dinner jacket he pulled first one pigeon, then a second, a third. They spread soft white wings against the lambent sky and were gone.

A waiter hovered near Love's table, an attendant spirit on the edge of darkness. Love ordered two more Bacardi and limes and the bill, the *doloroso*. The horns blew another chord.

"Now, a volunteer," called Turkoman. "You, sir? No, not *you*, sir. The gentleman behind you."

A thick-necked Dutchman came forward reluctantly, tugging down the sides of his jacket. Turkoman shook his hand, and then, half turning to the audience, produced the Dutch flag from the Dutchman's pocket, a gramophone record from inside his jacket, a pack of cards from behind his right ear. Applause came up in a roar.

The Dutchman stood sweating in the light, slightly fuddled with wine; he turned to reach the safe anonymity of his table.

"Just one moment, sir," Turkoman called after him. "Your wallet. Your watch. And your driving licence."

The Dutchman patted his pockets, bemused. How the devil did the fellow do it? More clapping as Turkoman handed these belongings back to him.

"One last thing," he said. "A letter."

The square of envelope gleamed whitely in the spotlight. The Dutchman grabbed it thankfully and retreated to the merciful darkness.

Turkoman invited more people out to join him; a bald Frenchman wearing a blue mohair suit, an English honeymoon couple, a German woman with her hair in a tight bun.

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"Wish he'd choose me," said Angela suddenly.

"Well, stand up. He's almost bound to if he sees you."

"You think so?" She pushed back her chair tentatively.

Turkoman's sharp eyes saw the movement beyond the rim of the spotlight.

"*Voilà!*" he cried, and waved a greeting to her. "You are American, yes?"

"Yes. From Santa Barbara."

"Well, because you are you, and because I'm also flying to America tonight—I open in New York on Monday—here is a small present. Sweets for the sweet."

He shook her hand; somehow a huge, circular box of chocolates materialised. From Angela's sleeve he pulled a long red ribbon, wound it round and round the box, tied a big bow, handed the box of chocolates to her. The applause came up again.

Angela was halfway back to Love's table when a shout of anger came from across the terrace.

"That letter—it's gone! I've only got the envelope."

Turkoman's first guest was standing up, his face red with annoyance, confusion.

The manager emerged from the gloom, washing his hands without water, ready with his instant-appeasement kit of soft words, a look of concern.

"Perhaps you dropped it, sir? We all saw you receive it back."

Heads nodded; yes, they had all seen that clearly.

The Dutchman sat down, baffled, scratching his hair. Maybe it had fallen out of the envelope on the way to the men's room? Hell, if only he hadn't drunk so much. He began to search through his other pockets.

Turkoman bowed to a last roar of applause, and then walked off the terrace. The band struck up a Letkiss; couples straggled back on to the dance floor.

Angela said regretfully: "Guess we'll have to go soon. It's certainly been a swell evening. But I wish these Dutch cooks used a bit more garlic."

"Me, too. France spoils you for plain fare. Well, I'll settle up. It won't take an hour to reach Schiphol in the Cord."

"Cord? Are you by any chance the owner of that lovely roadster parked out under the pines?"

Turkoman had come from the side of the *château*; he was at a table near them, smiling, a glass in his hand.

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"The same," Love allowed.

"Haven't seen one in years," Turkoman went on. "Could I possibly cadge a ride in it to the airport—if you're taking the young lady?"

"Surely," said Love. "You're only doing a short season here?"

"Yes, six nights."

"You were in the South of France last week," said Love, batting back the conversation. "I saw your name on a poster."

"Ah, yes. And before that I was in Rome."

He seemed pleased to be so international.

The band started again: *Auld Lang Syne.* But even old acquaintance would be forgot eventually, everything was.

Turkoman said: "I'll collect my overnight bag—my main kit's gone ahead already. Be right with you both."

He finished his drink, walked rapidly towards the *château.* Love signalled to the waiter. Who was the man who said he had lost a letter? The waiter whispered his identity; a five-guilder piece reflected the moon.

Love guided Angela towards the car. Holland this week, France last and Rome before that. A wheel began to turn in Love's mind; a name on a poster, a stay in two cities.

Love held the box of chocolates as Angela climbed into the Cord. He slipped off the ribbon, opened the box, offered it to her. On an impulse he untied the bow in the ribbon. Inside a knot beneath it was a piece of paper, folded over several times. He slipped it into his pocket.

"Quite finished?" asked Angela. "What's that, anyway—a lucky message?"

"We'll both know soon. Now, here's our companion. Wait till I raise the subject. Okay?"

"Okay."

He squeezed her hand.

Turkoman climbed in beside Angela, shut the door. Love turned the ignition key against the Startix. The eight-cylinder Lycoming engine rumbled into life. On the main road the wind combed their hair close to their heads. The air felt fresh and damp; nowhere in Holland was far from the sea. When Love saw the signpost, *Amsterdam 40 km,* he turned to Turkoman.

"Tell me," he said easily. "What did you do with that man's letter?"

"What do you mean?" asked Turkoman, surprised.

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In the green glow of the dashlights Love saw his eyes narrow. A shadow touched his face and was gone; perhaps it was only the shadow of a tree against the moon?

"You know exactly what I mean. And you think it's still in the ribbon. But it's not. It's here."

As he spoke, he took the paper from his pocket, unfolded it. Glittering splinters cascaded on to Angela's lap, each bright as the eyes of a woman in love.

"Diamonds," she breathed in amazement. "But— What the hell—?"

"Give me those," said Turkoman roughly. He grabbed the stones.

"What interests me," said Love, "is how you've got away with it so easily up to now."

Turkoman turned slightly in his seat. The dashlights glowed on the blue barrel of a .25 Star Starlet auto-loading pistol that had grown in his left hand, an extension of his arm.

"I don't give a damn what interests you, or the girl," he said sharply. "Keep both hands on the wheel. I'm getting out. I'll tell you when to stop."

Angela looked from one man to the other, but neither looked at her.

Love shrugged as though conceding defeat. He leaned gently against the armrest of his door, felt the click of the tiny switch on MacGillivray's gadget.

Ahead, the road forked; a sign glowed luminously in their headlights. Love swung to the right down a side turning surfaced with red bricks.

"Why?" asked Turkoman suspiciously.

"Short cut."

They fled across metal bridges, above canals, through shuttered villages, out on the long, raised road again, between fields where tulips slept, petals folded together like children's hands in prayer.

And then, far ahead, Love saw a faint blue light winking, and settled more easily into his seat. Two hundred yards; one hundred; fifty; the blue bulb flickered on the roof of a white Volkswagen police car.

"Looks like an accident," he said casually; the car had stopped halfway over the road, blocking it.

Turkoman leaned across Angela, dug the snout of the pistol against Love's stomach.

"Get through as quickly as you can," he said urgently. "And no tricks."

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"But I'm a doctor," protested Love. "Maybe I can help."

As he spoke, he trod the brake pedal savagely into the floor. The huge car slewed from side to side, tyres smoking on the rough brick surface.

Instinctively, Angela ducked. The movement deflected Turkoman's arm. Love flicked his left hand out across her bent back, caught Turkoman's throat with the edge of his palm. He dropped the gun, sagged forward dizzily, gasping for breath. The Cord stopped.

Love heard the frenzied crackle of static on the police-car radio, one call-sign repeated and repeated. He switched off MacGillivray's gadget. The chattering died. Policemen in blue overcoats, with strange hats and black belts, filled the silence.

"Diamonds," he said to the lieutenant who stood on a level with his gears. "You'll find them in his pocket. Loose."

"Yes?"

A sergeant scooped them from Turkoman's jacket, said something to the lieutenant.

Two policemen opened the door, pulled Turkoman out, led him to a blue police van parked off the road. He did not look back.

Love lifted the box of chocolates from Angela's lap, opened it, prodded at the array of soft centres. But they only contained soft centres, nothing else. Hell, was he completely wrong? Then he took the lid, ripped off the padded maroon silk, the soft quilting underneath. Stuck to the cardboard were three pieces of white sticking-plaster. He lifted one. For the second time that night, diamonds glittered in the car.

"Who are you, and how is it that you are apparently able to send out a radio signal on our police wavelength?" the officer asked curiously, watching him.

"Later," replied Love. "Before I start that, I think you'll find that these are the diamonds stolen in Cannes and Rome and Athens."

"We'll check them with their descriptions back at the station. In the meantime, we'll need a statement."

"By all means. Ride with me to the airport. This young lady has a plane to catch."

He started the Cord, drove back towards the main road. The night was very still; the moon had put on a halo of cloud; even the stars were dark.

"I'm a doctor," Love told the lieutenant. "And thus little things are often important things. I heard there had been

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three robberies in three different places, and I'd seen Turkoman's name on a poster in one of them. He told me he'd been to one of the others. So two bits of a jigsaw fitted.

"When I found out from a waiter that the man whom Turkoman asked out to help with his act tonight was senior partner in one of Amsterdam's biggest diamond firms, the third dropped into place.

"These diamond men carry stones worth a fortune wrapped up in a twist of paper. Turkoman could easily remove this from the envelope—as easily as taking a diamond ring or even a necklace from a woman.

"He'd concealed the stones he'd stolen elsewhere in the chocolate box lid, but he hadn't time for this tonight, so he tied them up in the ribbon and wound that round the box.

"He'd guessed he'd be searched at Schiphol airport pretty thoroughly—that diamond dealer would almost certainly tell the police or Customs what had happened. So Turkoman needed a carrier—someone whose luggage wouldn't be suspected at all. And who better than one of a party of American college girls who was carrying a box of chocolates and lots of happy memories about the Zuyder Zee? As soon as she reached New York and was through the Customs, he'd get them back. QED."

"Ah, yes. No doubt. And your name and address here in Holland, please?"

"Dr. Jason Love. The Amstel Hotel, Amsterdam. Here's my passport if it's necessary."

"It won't be. If you could drop me at the nearest police station—I'll direct you—we'll telephone you at your hotel tomorrow for an official statement. I don't wish to delay you further since your friend has a plane to catch."

Love stopped the car outside a flat-roofed building; the lieutenant got out, saluted, went inside.

"It all sounds simple, the way you tell it," said Angela, when they were on their way again. "But what gave you the first hint?"

"What I call the seventy-sixth face."

"And what's that?"

"A cut diamond has seventy-five sides or faces. The seventy-sixth face belongs to its owner. This shows pride of possession; sometimes alarm, usually acquisitiveness. I saw all three on Turkoman's face."

"Oh." Then, softly: "I wonder what you saw in mine?"

Love told her.

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by Donald Barthelme

GAME

SHOTWELL keeps the jacks and the rubber ball in his attaché case and will not allow me to play with them. He plays with them, alone, sitting on the floor near the console hour after hour, chanting "Onesies, twosies, threesies, foursies" in a precise, well-modulated voice—not so loud as to be annoying, not so soft as to allow me to forget.

I point out to Shotwell that two can derive more enjoyment from playing jacks than one, but he is not interested. I have asked repeatedly to be allowed to play by myself, but he simply shakes his head.

"Why?" I ask.

"They're mine," he says. And when he has finished, when he has sated himself, back they go into the attaché case.

It is unfair but there is nothing I can do about it. I ache to get my hands on them.

Shotwell and I watch the console. Shotwell and I live under the ground and watch the console. If certain events take place upon the console, we are to insert our keys in the appropriate locks and turn our keys. Shotwell has a key and I have a key. If we turn our keys simultaneously the bird flies—certain switches are activated and the bird flies. But the bird never flies. In one hundred and thirty-three days the bird has not flown.

Meanwhile, Shotwell and I watch each other. We each wear a .45 and if Shotwell behaves strangely I am supposed to shoot him. If I behave strangely Shotwell is supposed to

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shoot me. We watch the console and think about shooting each other and think about the bird. Shotwell's behaviour with the jacks is strange. Is it strange? I do not know. Perhaps he is merely a selfish bastard, perhaps his character is flawed, perhaps his childhood was twisted.

I do not know.

Each of us wears a .45 and each of us is supposed to shoot the other if the other is behaving strangely. What is "strangely"? I do not know. In addition to the .45, I have a .38 that Shotwell does not know about, concealed in my attaché case, and Shotwell has a .25-calibre Beretta that I do not know about, strapped to his right calf. Sometimes, instead of watching the console I pointedly watch Shotwell's .45, but this is simply a ruse, simply a manœuvre. In reality I am watching his hand when it dangles in the vicinity of his right calf. If he decides I am behaving strangely he will shoot me —not with the .45 but with the Beretta. Similarly Shotwell pretends to watch my .45 but he is really watching my hand resting idly atop my attaché case, my hand resting idly atop my attaché case, my hand. My hand resting idly atop my attaché case.

In the beginning I took care to behave normally. So did Shotwell. Our behaviour was painfully normal. Norms of politeness, consideration, speech, and personal habits were scrupulously observed. But then it became apparent that an error had been made, that our relief was not going to appear. Owing to an oversight. Owing to an oversight we have been here for one hundred and thirty-three days. When it became clear that an error had been made, that we were not to be relieved, the norms were relaxed. Definitions of normality were redrawn in the agreement of January 1st, called by us "The Agreement." Uniform regulations were relaxed, mealtimes no longer rigorously scheduled. We eat when we are hungry and sleep when we are tired. Considerations of rank and precedence were temporarily set aside—a handsome concession on the part of Shotwell, who is a captain, whereas I am a first lieutenant.

One of us watches the console at all times rather than two of us watching the console at all times, except when we are both on our feet. One of us watches the console at all times and if the console becomes agitated then that one wakes the other and we turn our keys in the locks simultaneously and the bird flies. Our system involves a delay of perhaps twelve seconds but I do not care because I am not well, and Shotwell

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does not care because he is not himself. After the agreement was signed, Shotwell produced the jacks and the rubber ball from his attaché case, and I began to write a series of descriptions of forms occurring in nature, such as a shell, a leaf, a stone, an animal.

On the walls.

Shotwell plays jacks and I write descriptions of natural forms on the walls. I am aching to get my hands on them, the jacks.

Shotwell is enrolled in a USAFI course leading to a Master's degree in business administration from the University of Wisconsin (although we are not in Wisconsin; we are in Utah, Montana, or Idaho). When we went down it was in either Utah, Montana, or Idaho, I don't remember. We have been here for one hundred and thirty-three days owing to an oversight. The pale-green reinforced concrete walls sweat and the air-conditioning zips on and off erratically and Shotwell reads *Introduction to Marketing*, by Lassiter and Munk, making notes with a blue ballpoint pen. Shotwell is not himself but I do not know it. He presents a calm aspect and reads *Introduction to Marketing* and makes his exemplary notes with a blue ballpoint pen, meanwhile controlling the .38 in my attaché case with one-third of his attention.

I am not well.

We have been here one hundred and thirty-three days owing to an oversight. Although now we are not sure what is oversight, what is plan. Perhaps the plan is for us to stay here permanently, or if not permanently at least for a year, for three hundred and sixty-five days. Or if not for a year for some number of days known to them and not known to us, such as two hundred days. Or perhaps they are observing our behaviour in some way—censors of some kind. Perhaps our behaviour determines the number of days. It may be that they are pleased with us, with our behaviour—not in every detail but in sum. Perhaps the whole thing is very successful, perhaps the whole thing is an experiment and the experiment is very successful. I do not know. Or perhaps the only way they can persuade sun-loving creatures into their pale-green sweating reinforced concrete rooms under the ground is to say that the system is twelve hours on, twelve hours off. And then lock us below for some number of days known to them and not known to us.

Perhaps, perhaps.

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We eat well, although the frozen *enchiladas* are damp when defrosted and the frozen devil's-food-cake is sour and untasty. We sleep uneasily and acrimoniously. I hear Shotwell shouting in his sleep—objecting, denouncing, cursing sometimes, weeping sometimes, in his sleep.

When Shotwell sleeps I try to pick the lock of his attaché case, so as to get at the jacks. Thus far I have been unsuccessful.

Nor has Shotwell been successful in picking the lock on my attaché case so as to get at the .38. I have seen the marks on the shiny surface.

I laughed, in the latrine, pale-green walls sweating and the air-conditioning whispering, in the latrine. I ache to get my hands on them. The jacks.

I write descriptions of natural forms on the walls, scratching them on the tiled surface with a diamond. The diamond is a two-and-one-half-carat solitaire I had in my attaché case when we went down. It was for Lucy. The south wall of the room containing the console is already covered. I have described a shell, a leaf, a stone, animals, a baseball bat. I am aware that the baseball bat is not a natural form. Yet I described it.

"The baseball bat," I said, "is typically made of wood. It is typically one metre in length or a little longer, fat at one end, tapering to afford a comfortable grip at the other. The end with the handhold typically offers a slight rim, or lip, at the nether extremity, to prevent slippage."

My description of the baseball bat ran to forty-five hundred words, all scratched with a diamond on the south wall.

Does Shotwell read what I have written? I do not know. I am aware that Shotwell regards my writing-behaviour as a little strange. Yet it is no stranger than his jacks-behaviour, or than the day he appeared in black bathing trunks with the .25-calibre Beretta strapped to his right calf and stood over the console, trying to span with his two arms outstretched the distance between the locks. He could not do it; I had already tried standing over the console with my two arms outstretched —the distance is too great. I was moved to comment but did not comment. Comment would have provoked counter-comment, comment would have led God knows where. They had, in their infinite patience, in their infinite foresight, in their infinite wisdom, already imagined a man standing over the console with his two arms outstretched, trying to span with

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his two arms outstretched the distance between the locks. Perhaps.

Shotwell is not himself. He has made certain overtures. The burden of his message is not clear. It has something to do with the keys, with the locks. Shotwell is strange. He appears to be less affected by our situation than I. He goes about his business stolidly, watching the console, studying *Introduction to Marketing,* bouncing his rubber ball on the floor in a steady, rhythmical, conscientious manner. He appears to be less affected by our situation than I. He is stolid. He says nothing. But he has made certain overtures, certain overtures have been made. I am not sure that I understand them. They have something to do with the keys, with the locks. Shotwell has something in mind. Stolidly he shucks the shiny silver paper from the frozen *enchiladas,* stolidly he stuffs them into the electric oven. But he has something in mind. But there must be a *quid pro quo.* I insist on a *quid pro quo.*

I have something in mind.

I am not well. I do not know our target. They do not tell us for which city the bird is targeted. I do not know. That is planning. That is not my responsibility. My responsibility is to watch the console and when certain events take place upon the console, to turn my key in the lock. Shotwell bounces the rubber ball on the floor in a steady, stolid, rhythmical manner. I am aching to get my hands on the ball, on the jacks. We have been here one hundred and thirty-three days owing to an oversight. I write on the walls. Shotwell chants " Onesies, twosies, threesies, foursies " in a precise, well-modulated voice. Now he cups the jacks and the rubber ball in his hands and rattles them suggestively. I do not know for which city the bird is targeted.

Shotwell is not himself.

Sometimes I cannot sleep. Sometimes Shotwell cannot sleep. Sometimes, when Shotwell cradles me in his arms and rocks me to sleep, singing Brahms' *Guten Abend, gut' Nacht,* or when I cradle Shotwell in my arms and rock him to sleep, singing, I understand what it is Shotwell wishes me to do. At such moments we are very close.

But only if he will give me the jacks. That is fair. There is something he wants me to do with my key while he does something with his key.

But only if he will give me my turn. That is fair. I am not well.

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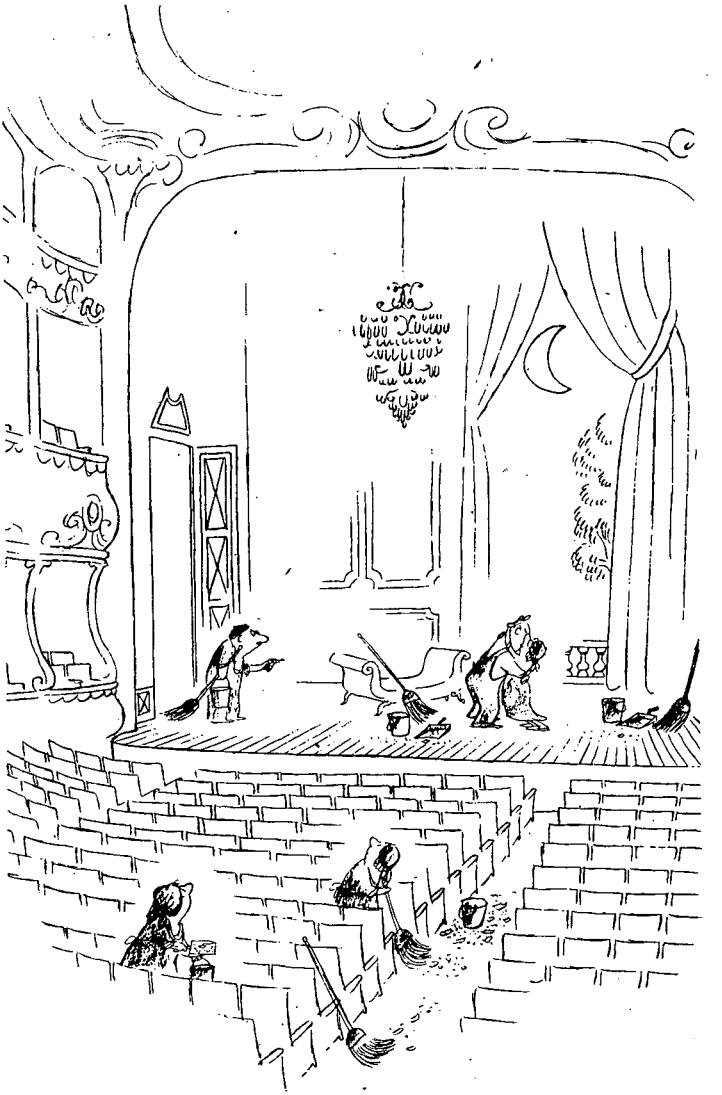
Sempé



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BY ARMSTRONG KING

HYACINTH

STUB ALLEN, who bought land cheap in Dru during the Depression and cursed it for thirty years, was a stiff-necked fool of a man locked all his life in self-made struggle; obdurate and rightly nicknamed Stub. Now he had discovered water hyacinth in Dru Creek where he had gone after the snake old Madge had been nattering about.

"A'right, a'right," he had bellowed before storming out with a length of fencing wire in his hand. "I'll crack its flaming back or there'll never be any peace." And he had cut viciously at the mean grass which kept lean and penurious sheep alive, hard-woolled beasts, worthless like every other cursed weed of Dru.

He could have got out after that snake weeks ago when old Madge first mentioned it and by early detection saved himself the toil of beating the 'cinth. "When I'm ready," he had sworn as he always did. "Then and not before."

It was the same with the paint which he had bought two years before and which was now ageing and hardening in the shed. "When I'm ready," was all Madge got out of him and now she did not care whether the house stood or fell, rotted or prospered.

Thirty years of battling him had all but quietened her, but a black snake had to be killed. Even in Dru where the land was pebble hard and the trees stood split with hardship, even there, a snake was an abomination. "I'll cut my tongue off before I'll ask him to paint the place again," she vowed.

Now Stub was down by the dam where the crippled swamp gums bent over the raging drone of flies. The creek oozed

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like pus from the broken flank of Mount Dare-Not and, but for the dam which had half broken Stub's back in the making, would have lost itself in bog. That water was the only thing that kept life on Stub's land at all.

The dam stretched a hundred yards of foreign green, a baffling growth unseen before in Dru. Stub thought no more about the black snake. Snakes you could snap spine-wise in your own good time, but Nature snapped you. He half guessed what the 'cinth was. He was used to the rank and bad growth of noxious weed, but that which stole water stole land.

"Yeh," they confirmed down at the pub, "that's 'cinth all right. Seen it on the Brisbane. Get that in your dam and you can give the game away."

"Eighteen months and your dam's solid. You'll never water another sheep once that gets a hold."

"Grows quicker than debt. You need chemicals against it."

But Stub would hear no word about chemicals, biting abhorrent things unused by Nature, inventions of the damned and the learned. "No chemicals are going in *my* water," he swore as though his neighbours were traitors bent on his ruin.

"Noxious weeds," they urged. "Government does it. Won't cost you a cracker."

"No chemicals," he declared in final bigotry. "Don't believe in 'em."

It was no use arguing. Stub had two hands of his own. He would use them and nobody would stop him. Such was Stub Allen.

"Fair enough, then," they agreed in the end. "We'll help."

So much was self-evident. No man lived alone in Dru—fire, flood, drought, vermin and weed. One man's hand had strength only in the clasp of another man's.

They could have kicked themselves for the offering.

"I'll solve my own problems," Stub insisted.

"Stubborn bastard," they swore beyond ear-shot, nasty now with a neighbour who helped all others and took help from none.

"Anyway," they concluded, "it's up to the Government. A card'd do it."

Stub said nothing to Madge for two days.

"Did you get that black snake?" she asked finally.

He did not answer. Heat was roaring up on a burning northerly. The old house, unpainted for thirty years, was splitting with dry rot. He would have painted it ten, twenty

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years ago, but for old Madge's nagging. Now the house was hot beyond endurance. He sat out on the veranda all night thinking. He began the next morning.

"And shut your flaming mouth about snakes," he warned Madge, all haste now, mad with driving energy, scared and full of fear for his sheep tangled knee-deep in mud and hyacinth. They were all he had after thirty years.

On that first morning he plunged up to his thighs in black mud, swiping the roaring flies from his cracked skin and fighting the first round with the hyacinth which could rob a man of water and leave him broke. He strove all that day with matchet and rake turning the shade between the broken gums into a wet and fetid ruin.

He battled the next day, and the next, and as he fought the heat broke up from the hills. Nobody remembered such heat. Night could not kill it nor could the rain cool it. It came down thick and heavy, humid, killing heat, flattening the sheep and filling the pub in Dru.

When Stub appeared on the evening of the third day they pressed him with conciliatory beer, appalled by his weariness.

"How's she going, Stub?"

"She'll be right."

"Got her beat, then?"

"She'll be right."

"Sulphate of . . ."

"No chemicals." And Stub pounded the bar top in malice, unyielding, inflexible and obstinate. "I'm having no chemicals poisoning my stock."

"Stubbornest cow *we* ever saw," they marvelled after he had gone.

Stub Allen's battle with the water hyacinth occupied all interest in Dru, an unseen struggle among the swamp gums, something legendary to be remembered over future beer. And they sent boys out, sneaking up around Mount Dare-Not, spies to report on Stub's progress.

"It'll beat him," they prophesied.

Stub spotted the black snake on the fifth day at his tiredest moment just before dusk. It came slithering down through the mud, its belly orange with age, a black snake pining for water, six feet long and as thick as an arm; a watchful creature of malice and guile.

Stub stood up to his waist in mud peering through the half light, a man broken by toil.

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"Yes, you cow," he swore aloud, "I'd have you snapped clean as a whistle if I could get at me fencing wire." But the length of wire was nearer to the snake than to Stub.

The snake came no nearer. It coiled itself, black and poisonous in the mud, glad of any wetness pending Stub's departure.

Stub's bare legs were buried two feet down in mud. Black snakes were good swimmers. They could live forty minutes under water. Once that snake got into the dam...

He scrambled out.

"I'll get you first, you bastard," he blasphemed. And he watched the snake, eye to eye, two old-timers facing ruin down by Dru Creek. But the snake knew fencing wire, and slid away somewhere under the heaps of wet vegetation, hiding, crafty; a serpent.

So Stub toiled on through the next day splitting his attention between two enemies, the 'cinth and the old snake, either one of which could finish him.

"Black snakes are not lethal," he bluffed himself the next day, tearing at the thick and succulent stalks and lifting out a hundred-pound weight of slime and water and stalk. "They can put you down for a bad spell, but they don't kill." But still his bare legs shivered in the hot mud beneath the 'cinth.

That evening they stood awed by his depletion, astonished and spiteful, resentful of a man unbending who rejected the help of Dru.

"Black snake," he told them with proprietary detail, "sliding round the flaming dam mad for water."

When he straightened himself from the bar he perspired in weakness. "Just say when you're ready for a..." But they were talking at the back of a man broken by tiredness.

Then suddenly there was rebellion in Dru and those who had talked tolerance and the right of a man on his own land, turned about and cursed Stub for his obduracy, convinced that disaster was common disaster to be fought and mastered mutually.

"He was always ready with a hand himself," they accused as though that were a fault in a man.

"We'd have lost the old place up at Grayler but for him and a few more last summer."

"No better mate in a fire."

Thus they encircled each other, men in anger, finishing off their beer bad-temperedly, baffled with a man who understood no rules. "A couple more days and we're out there whether

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he likes it or not." And they waited for news brought in by scouting youngsters enjoying the battle in Dru.

But talk was easy.

"He can be nasty when crossed."

"I remember when old John Berry . . ."

So they recounted tales, repicturing all Stub's obstinacy, adding fiction where fact was missing, almost happy in the recollection of un-neighbourliness.

The next day was Sunday and the pub was supposed to be closed but Bert Ridge cleared half his stock, so good was custom.

"I don't want the johns up here," he complained as a matter of form, not caring a damn about the police.

"How is old Stub, then?"

Thus it went on. Day after day saw the pub open to every late hour. Seldom had there been such a spate of drinking in Dru.

Ron Evers summed up the matter: "We're making a bloody circus out of it."

Then conscience struck.

"Poor old Stub," somebody said. "I bet a quid he's waiting for us to get out there and give a hand. You don't think he is going to *ask*, do you?"

This changed opinion as wind changes the direction of fire. "Could be," they agreed, wondering now whether they had been wrong and not Stub.

Still, nobody dare approach Stub who, day after day, fought the hyacinth which grew in complementary madness, every severed stem a new plant; every smashed root, genesis. And the old black snake watched him daily from two unlidded eyes red-pointed with savage enmity.

"And in this weather!" they gasped, gathering in the pub, angry men for all their solicitude; afraid to intervene.

"We got our own worries," they pretended, picturing the battle in Dru. "Stubborn devil," they agreed, wrapping praise in the harsh use of bad language lest they be discovered in sentiment.

And while they drank and talked, Stub watched the snake's shadowy evil in the cast of the drooping wattles.

"This time I'll get you," he gasped, wading through the mud softly in case he woke the snake which he believed to be sleeping.

It was a hundred and four in the shade of the wattles as he reached for the fencing wire. Then, afraid of slipping in his

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exhaustion, he fell forward gently on his belly, slithering towards the half-coiled snake, coming up inch by inch until their faces were almost touching, two creatures in the mud, one coiled in sleep, one raising a strengthless arm for the final slash.

The wire caught the snake fair across the spine and snapped the vertebrae clean. Stub rolled back in the mud and when he looked up the black snake was winding itself into a last coil, a venomous thing hating Stub with final malice; a stiffening cord supporting a searching head.

Then Stub miscalculated in his weariness and the snake got him in the hand at the last moment before it died. After that they lay together in the mud with evening coming down.

They would have left the pub early that night but for old Madge who came racing down at the last moment.

"Went out at five this morning and he's not home yet," she told them.

That was enough. They drove out to Dru Creek, every man in Dru, bitter now and resolved, more like enemies than friends, furious in emergency, a community bent on subduing Stub Allen.

They found him in the reeking darkness, a victim more dead than alive. They bore him with new gentleness back to the old unpainted house and waited for the doctor.

It was a hospital job and Stub Allen came as near to death as was possible for a man who has yet to live.

In the meantime the water hyacinth leapt with unchecked vigour stronger than ever for Stub's pruning; an unkillable thing for ever spreading. But nobody touched it. Nobody dared.

After a month they brought Stub back to Dru and seated him on his veranda, a limping, yellow-skinned wreck whose word no longer counted.

"The Government's keen enough on taking your taxes," they bullied him. "Give them a ring..."

"No chemicals," Stub finalised, barely able to raise his voice, a cripple pampered by old Madge, a man useless on his own land.

"Chemicals?" they jeered, unafraid of him now. "You'd have been as stiff as that snake yourself now if they hadn't filled you with chemicals."

Stub eyed them with scowling resentment, a beaten fool, still unconvinced.

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In their hearts they had finished with this bigot who had neither brain nor understanding. So they kept their mouths shut and left him brooding on his veranda in the blue, fresh autumn weather.

"We'll risk it," they decided in conference.

A week later as Stub sat on his veranda looking out over the withered paddock and down to the swamp gums covering Dru Creek, and just as he was nodding off, he was awakened by movement to the left of him.

"Looks like they're going to do the job, then," old Madge said, edging up behind him.

Stub's eyes glistened with wonderment as the Government truck bumped slowly over his paddock with the population of Dru marching after it like brigands or nomads with no homes of their own.

"I'll have the law..." Stub raged in black-mad fury. But he was helpless, a spirit without limbs.

All Dru watched the slaying of the hyacinth, a simple matter in the light of science.

And as they watched, so watched Stub with his hands iron-stiff on the arms of his chair, a man locked out and barred from his own affairs.

"No," the Government people guaranteed when the dam and the hyacinth had been sprayed, "it won't affect the sheep at all."

Then the people of Dru came over the paddock, looking up at the old house, half ashamed, half resolved, uncertain now and part afraid for deeds committed.

Stub rose up to meet them with the sense of Wrong strengthening his limbs. Thus, as he stood, he watched them, they were petitioners now, unsure and nervous on another man's land.

They stopped before the veranda and Bert Ridge stepped forward in the autumn silence throwing his cigarette-end away, facing up to Stub and breathing deeply.

"How you off for paint, Stub?" he asked quietly, and all Dru waited, listening in the fresh sunshine.

Stub felt the weakness coming over him. He sank down into his chair.

"Fair," he murmured, and you could hear every breath that day on Stub's paddock.

"Might have a go, then, next week," Bert spoke up casually, fumbling for a cigarette. "A dozen of us should slap the old place over in no time."

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Stub looked round and the silence deepened.

"She'll need two coats of red lead," he stipulated after long consideration. "She'll not take a larrup of paint without two."

His neighbours broke silence and came forward, climbing on to his veranda.

"Fair enough," they agreed, looking up into the blue of heaven and not into his eyes. "Two of red lead she'll be."

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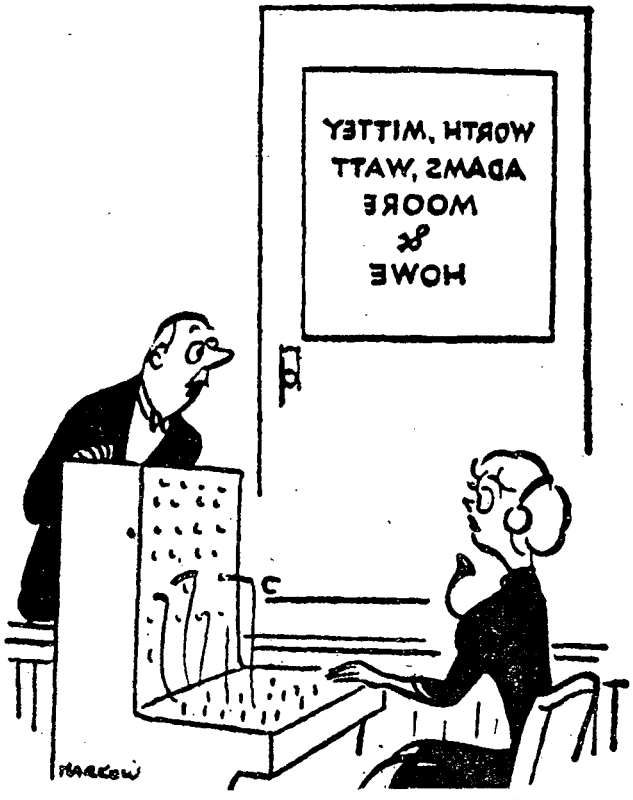

"I know you're new at this job, but it isn't 'Yettim, Htrow, Ttaw, Smada, Eroom, and Ewoh, good morning'!"

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A Tale told in the Twilight

Mama Fixum knew the law of the West, but it took courage to kill — even the outlaw who shot down her husband

BY GERALD KERSH

HEARING frenzied footsteps and a hooting of predatory boys, the old lady came out of her quiet little house, leaning upon a light hickory stick with a silver band under the handle. She could detect one boy running nimbly ahead of the rest and knew, by his breathing, that he was in some distress.

So she waited until the hunted boy was in the shadow of her porch and his pursuers were giving voice. She paused, listening; then smiled; and came into the open, brandishing her stick and calling the boys by name almost playfully as she struck at them: "Oh, your back, Charlie Lygoe—your back, your back! Oh, poor Jack Sparrow—your legs, your legs, your legs! Oh your arm, John Cotton, your poor arm!"

They fled, terrified. Her stick stung, but her voice bit deep; and there was something especially frightening in the way the pale-eyed gentlewoman called her blows.

Now she turned to the boy who had been running away. He had caught his breath.

"What did you run away for?"

"They wanted this pie, ma'am."

"So you ran?"

"Yes'm—" he was urgent in his own defence "—I can run rings around 'em. I did not run for fear. I had this pie to bring to you. I figured I might wind Charlie Lygoe and the others, then fight it through, ma'am, and save this pie."

"Good boy. And what would you've done if they had caught you, eh?"

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"Ate some of the pie, slapped the rest in Jack Sparrow's face and run again."

"And what about Charlie Lygoe?"

"Oh, he'd be down, and then there would be only one by the time Jack Sparrow got the pie out of his eye. So I would have tackled John Cotton, and anyone can handle *him*."

"Good. I like you. You will go far."

The boy asked, breathless again, "Are you telling my fortune, ma'am?"

"Fortunes cut two ways," said the old lady, laughing. "Everybody goes far, don't you see—up to heaven or down to t'other place."

"Yes'm."

It would have been inaccurate to call this old woman tender in her manner—tenderised is the word for her, as for strong flesh rendered soft by hard knocks and the passage of time. She was much feared in Troy Grove, Illinois, because it was believed that Mama Fixum, as she was called, had the gift of second sight. She looked as it were through a film of skimmed milk, yet you sensed that she was aware of your every movement, even of your change of expression. Certainly, for a blind woman, Mama Fixum was fantastically perceptive.

She was supposed to go abroad at night when she should have been sleeping and not walking; but if she was, as rumour had it, a witch, her magic was of the white sort that heals but does not hurt and lays no curses; and for her blessings she made no charge to rich and poor alike.

Still, to be on the safe side, the housewives of Troy Grove used to send her cakes and jars of preserves with their compliments and kindest regards, while their husbands raised their hats to her in the street. At all events, they said, old Mama Fixum is a lady.

All the same, they crossed their fingers behind her back when she passed, tapping with her little stick; because hers had been no ordinary life.

She knew every one of the children of the neighbourhood—even if they did not speak—by the way they moved, so that now, when the awkward girlish boy came into her house with the pumpkin pie, Mama Fixum dilated her nostrils, delicately sniffing its aroma and, extending a bony but sensitive hand, explored the boy's head.

"Aye, aye," she muttered, "many a girl would give more than she ought for that cornsilk hair and cheeks like warm

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peaches! Set you down, little Jimmy Butler and I'll give you a glass of rhubarb wine and some of my own little cakes. And thanks very kindly for the pie. I'll give you a jug of my old elderberry wine to take home to your good people because it is a specific for the fever."

The boy shrank back a little—there was something frightening in the smooth face of the old lady and in the knowledgeable touch of her fingertips. He had an awful vision of something older than Time—a brain activated by ten eyes at the ends of stalks.

Swallowing fright, he asked, boldly, "I wonder what it feels like to be blind?"

"It depends upon what a person means by seeing," said Mama Fixum, with a little laugh. "I've been well nigh blind near on to sixty years. Now you have lived all of ten years, Jimmy Butler, with the full use of your eyes. Look at me, sweetheart, and tell me what you see. Do, now! And I'll wager that I can see more of you blind, than you can see of me with your bright eyes. Now then! What do you see?"

The boy Jimmy did not know how to answer, so he asked, "If you please, ma'am, why do they call you Mama Fixum?"

She laughed. "Well done, child. When at a loss to answer a question, ask another and play for time. My real name, boy, is Phoebe Fiscombe; but names get altered according to the convenience of the vulgar. It is easier to say Fixum than Fiscombe. Thus Cholmondeley is pronounced Chumley, and Featherstonhaugh is pronounced Fanshaw. My grandfather was Sir Charles Fiscombe, child, who came to this country in 1758 from Devonshire in England. That was nearly a hundred years ago—if, as you should, you know your additions and subtractions—this being the year of Our Lord 1850. Playing and fighting were my grandfather's ruin."

The boy said, gravely, "I like playing, Mama Fixum, but they won't let me play with them. And I'm not afraid to fight, you know, only they laugh at me because I've got thin wrists—"

"Bah! Do you think I am talking of playing for marbles or alley-taws or whatnot, or fighting with your knees and elbows in the dust? Mercy, no! I speak of the cards and the dice—*écarté,* faro, ombre, piquet, and *poque* or, as they call it now, poker; and with the dice, hazard and the game of seven. Fighting was with the sword or pistol. The stakes were gold on the table, or blood in the field.

"They were men, child, men! But thank God you are half

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a girl, by the touch of you, and may be a curate and a ladies' darling; because gamblers die in poverty, and he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword."

"I don't want to be a whey-faced curate," the boy said.

"You hush now, little Jimmy! My grand-uncle Amyas, my grandfather's youngest brother, was vicar of Fiscombe, and they tell me there never was a heartier man nor a harder rider to hounds in the whole of the county of Devon; and if he could not bring a parishioner to grace with soft words, my grand-uncle Amyas took him by the scruff of the neck and beat the fear of the Lord into him with a stout stick—and drank his four bottles of wine at dinner. Whey-faced, indeed!"

"Mama Fixum, tell me about your grandfather. And is it true you shot an outlaw? And is it right what they say, you were stolen by the Injuns? And can you really read fortunes—"

"All that and more, child, all that and more," replied the old lady, laughing. "But one thing at a time. My grandfather, Sir Charles Fiscombe, was a fine man, once, but gaming was his downfall—high play and quick temper. They don't mix. So he fought a duel with young Lord Millis Hills, the son of the Earl, over a disputed hand at cards, and shot him dead in the dawn; therefore, he left England. For it was a saying, d'you see, that a Fiscombe never needed to fire twice at the same man, on account of a trick so simple that a born baby knows it... But these are not matters for little ears, so run along with you, boy Jimmy."

"What was the trick, Mama Fixum? Please tell me, please do!"

"Hm! You have a charm to unlock my tongue and steal my brains away, I see. Watch me clever and close—maybe this trick will stand you in good stead one of these cool evenings. Who can tell? Now, child, poor blind me, I can see little more than your outline. But where is my finger pointing?"

"At my breast, Mama Fixum."

"So! Now, you point your forefinger at something in this room; hold that finger steady—don't move, now—and take a sight down that finger. Well, what have you drawn a bead on?"

"That candlestick, ma'am."

"Imagine, now, that your index finger was the barrel of a pistol and your middle finger was the trigger finger. Your thumb, d'you see, holds the hammer back at full cock while

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your middle finger has the trigger down as far as it will go. The pointing finger is doing the aiming, now, so that all you want to do is lift your thumb, keeping right steady, and your ball will go exactly where the finger points, even in the half-dark.

"That was my grandfather's trick, and he died (rest his soul) of over-reliance on it, for after a game of faro he challenged a Spanish gentleman in Virginia. The challenged party has choice of weapons. The Spanish gentleman chose swords and ran my grandfather through at the second pass; for it takes an eye to be a swordsman—whereas anyone can shoot like poor blind me—and all my family were weak in the eyes. Take another cake and run along."

"And what about your father and how you were captured by the Injuns? And how did you shoot the outlaw?"

"Well, my grandfather died middling prosperous, and my dear father inherited the property, including four cases of pistols and the Fiscombe Curse which was a passion for play, whether with cards or dice. Sweetheart, better be born in a ditch with nothing, than in a palace with a lust to gamble! My mother was a Wyndham and she brought him twenty thousand dollars, but it all went—and so did he go.

"Died in a duel, pistols across a handkerchief, shot by a gentleman named Scudder. Witnesses opined that Scudder pulled his trigger a little too soon, but it was too late to argue. My honoured father fired his shot while he was down on his knees and, as I told you, a Fiscombe never shoots twice at the same target if it be human. Both perished simultaneously. Let this be a lesson to you."

"And can you really read the future, Mama Fixum?"

"Good gracious, yes, my dear! Did you ever carry keys in your pocket?"

"Yes'm."

"You knew by the feel which key opened what door?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"The key carried its own future with it, then, didn't it now?"

"Yes, Mama Fixum. How did you kill the outlaw, you being . . . not very well able to see?"

"Why, Jimmy, that person murdered my husband and there was nobody in all the world to hunt him down. They called him Wild Bull Chase and he was a bad man. He shot my husband in the back with a rifle, having lost a thousand dollars to him. For my husband—oh dear me, how long ago!

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—was also a Fiscombe, because he was my cousin three times removed. But all the world was afraid of Wild Bull Chase. Wild Bull by name, and wild bull by nature. He was the man that shot Bad Al Kohler and Red Ned Kelly. Our men were out after the Injuns mostly, in those days."

"But I heard, Mama Fixum, that you lived years with the Injuns."

"Ah, child, there's not much you miss! Time of the Massacre I was a little girl and, surely enough, the Injuns did carry me away."

"Did they torture you?" the boy asked, eagerly.

"Torture me? Bless your heart, not they! You see—I won't give you the right words for it, because that would take half the day, and it's high time you were home—there was a kind of politics. The Injuns let some white prisoners live while we let some Injun prisoners live. Diplomacy, it is called. It was in case both sides wanted to make a peaceful exchange of prisoners, one against the other. So it came to pass I lived five years with the Injun women. And many a thing they taught me in the way of herbs and medicines. One thing above all I learned—"

"Tell me how you killed that Wild Bull Chase, Mama Fixum."

"By learning what I'm trying to tell you, young fellow. By learning two of the hardest things in the world—namely, how to keep dead quiet, and how to keep dead still. The fools that were about in my time used to think the Injuns were devils. Nothing of the sort, child. The Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, it's true, but the lamb must have his nose to the wind, because the Lord helps those that help themselves.

"Watch sun and wind, Jimmy, and you can see to kill through milk; aye, though you can't read your Bible at twelve inches, guard your position and you'll be deadly against an eagle. The whole trick of invisibility, Jimmy, is to keep your head down, get close to something pretty nigh your own colour, and let every bone in your body go limp and stay limp. For this reason panthers were made with spots, and some insects like unto leaves.

"If it ain't a bird you are fighting, bear this in mind, and keep your back plumb in the eye of the sun. A good target, you say? So you are, if the other man knows how to hood his eyes. But then, he is at a disadvantage, because you can see him a sight clearer than he can see you, and the chances

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are five to two he'll miss you by a foot. Then he is at your mercy.

"He must fire again, so play Injun—keep still until he begins to reload and, while his eyes are down on his charge, edge closer; then, when he's aiming to sight a hundred paces behind you, spring up and confront him, and let him have it. But never forget, Jimmy honey, the forefinger along the barrel, the hammer back and the trigger pulled with the middle finger. Let your thumb go and no human speed will match the fall of the hammer with the snick of the spring. Now be off home with you."

The child persisted, "I want to know how you killed Wild Bull Chase, Mama Fixum."

"You take back that little jug of elderberry wine for the fever, child. You can have another cake, if you like. And don't go sipping my elderberry on the way home, because it is not for boys—only for ladies with the fever. Two nice big glasses at bedtime also cures the nightmare." She shook her head and said to herself, "Any excuse is better than none for the poor dears; put whisky in a medicine glass and they'd drink thirty ounces a day for their stomachs and blame the hiccups on their husbands."

"Yes," said the boy, "but you didn't tell me how you killed Wild Bull Chase."

"Oh, bless the child! You don't know that you open a sore old wound, my silky-haired little Jimmy. But Lord lend us patience! It happened like this. My good husband Digby, when the game of cards reached its end, put down a pair of aces and a pair of eights against Wild Bull Chase's aces and threes, and thereby legitimately won a thousand dollars. Wild Bull Chase got up in a huff and walked out of the Grove Tavern.

"It was a warm night and the door was open and my husband, they told me, was sitting with his back to the door. He wanted, you see, the benefit of the extra moonlight on his cards, being near-sighted like all us Fiscombes. Digby said goodnight to the other players and—he being never a man to come home, bless his heart, at a given time—sat in his place dealing himself imaginary hands; with the lamplight over him and the moonlight white on his back.

"Then, all of a sudden, my husband went forward as if a sledgehammer had struck him and fell on the table with a bullet in his back. A second or so later, people heard the sounds of the shot that had killed him. Oh, for your health's

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sake, Jimmy, never sit down with your back to an open door!

"If somebody had robbed my poor husband, suspicion might have fallen on Wild Bull Chase; then, no doubt, a few men would have taken out after him and searched him for money, and hanged him up if they had found it. But here was no occasion to rouse the town without evidence. Chase was known, everybody said, as a hand-gun fighter and not a rifleman. There was no evidence against Wild Bull Chase, man-killer though he was. Also, there was not much law in the land, then, and Chase had an elegant horse and a decent start.

"When they brought my man home, looking so quiet, whom everybody praised now in his death who had disliked him so much in his lifetime because they feared him, I put my hand on his marble forehead, and swore to his cold clay, 'Digby, lie still and rest; you shall be avenged!'

"The women here said I was unnatural because I did not cry. Poor girls, I had learned in a bitterer school than they. Work first, then cry; and let your face go to pieces before strangers? No. Grief is yours alone. I left Digby decently covered with a sheet and looked over the terrain where he had been shot. There was a dark mark on the floor and a lead ball only half buried in the table, where there were some scattered cards. Now, remembering what I knew of angles and woodcraft, it seemed to me that the shot must have been fired from Soo Hill, three hundred yards away as the crow flies; whoever shot my husband Digby must have been acting out of pure meanness, giving way to the temptation Digby's fine broad back must have offered in the lamplight and the moonlight.

"'I will find that man and he shall die in his tracks,' I vowed, and I went back home.

"And here was waiting a committee of ladies and gentlemen to commiserate with me, but I begged them to be gone and leave me alone, for pity's sake, with my dead. We used to have two house servants. One was a negro slave called Tarheel—a fine carpenter and cabinet-maker; the other was a white bondswoman called Vidler. When everyone else was gone, Tarheel said to me, 'Miz Fixum, I was up on Soo Hill huntin' for rabbit, and I distinkly seen that bad Wild Bull genamum draw a bead on Massa Fixum, framed like a picture-painting in the doorway. There weren't no way to stop 'im, me being so high up the hill, but I'd 'a throwed a rock at his hoss if I'd found one to hand.

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"'And before I could even cotch a breff to yell, he was gone. But I seen which way he headin'.' And this negro, weeping, says, 'I am not by law 'lowed to bear testimony 'gainst no white man, but I sure is 'lowed by law to hang by the neck. And I will surely, with yo' leave, follow that Wild Bull Chase to the end of the world for the sake o' Massa Fixum!'

"At this, containing myself, I said, 'Thank you, I take the will for the deed. And for this piece of bravery, Tarheel, you shall have your freedom and your own carpenter's shop. Load me the long English pistols and I'm after Wild Bull Chase, alone. Load me the pair, choose the balls well and let them be right, or I'll switch you with a hickory branch until it is bare of twigs!'

"Well, then, I changed my skirts for trousers, and my shoes for moccasins; for what I had to do was not work for petticoats. But now the bondswoman Vidler must have her say. And she says, 'Nay, mistress, but I'll not let thee. Have I not two strong hands and two good legs, and a pair of sharp eyes? While thee, poor lady, has but weak eyes. And thee must not kill, nor bear arms even. Nay, mistress, let me find him and bring the good folk to judge him, and spare thee the sin of—'

"I told her, 'Watch your dead master, slut, but for what you have this minute felt, you shall have freedom from bond and a dowry to marry a good husband. And mark you, you two,' says I, looking to my pistols and putting them into my sash, 'do you not see that Wild Bull Chase's benefit is also my advantage? He has the eye of a wolf, while I see only in a milky twilight. He must be travelling westwards; and I shall follow him this night and tomorrow—at a distance—until the evening comes down. Then we will see who stands on stronger ground! This is a game played in the twilight, you fools! And woe betide the man who meets a Fiscombe on his own terms!'

"Tarheel said, 'Massa Chase súrely was headin' westward, Miz Fixum—on a right good hoss.'

"I told him, and here's the truth, 'There never was a living horse could run down man or woman in distance; it is the brain that counts; otherwise, how could a tame horse loaded with man and saddle round up wild horses?'

"Then, weeping, 'Let me get thee some food to pack and a bottle of cold tea,' says Vidler, but I tell her that neither bite nor sup do I touch until Wild Bull Chase is dead—"

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"Mama Fixum, oughtn't you to have took something to eat and drink?" the boy interjected.

"No, because I had vowed my vow in another place, and I would eat lead and drink smoke before I broke that vow. So I kept the eye of the sun, when it rose, at my back and held it there—until it was overhead—while I picked up tracks of man and horse, circling then, when the trail led to Thompson's Creek which lay close by Pick's Woods.

"It had to be so, of course, because Wild Bull Chase was a fugitive—only from his conscience—and even if the townfolks had been after him he must have seen their horses miles away on these prairies. That is why I was surer and safer alone, and on foot; though Chase was well mounted and armed with a rifle. With this rifle, if I had been on horseback, he could have brought me down at five hundred paces. But I bided my time afoot, knowing where he had to go, which was to the water and wondering by what miracle the sun seemed to stand still in the sky—because if ever a morning and an afternoon lasted the whole six days of creation, this was it.

"You must understand, Jimmy boy, that I had to measure my light and my darkness in grains, like so much powder to carry a certain shot. There are two very hard shooting lights. Clear sunlight is a tricky one, but most treacherous of all is when the day marries the night; I mean, evening. Twilight is my light, yet I had to gauge how much light Wild Bull Chase needed to see by.

"So I crawled after him, knee and elbow, until he reached the creek. He thought he was alone, but I was only a hundred paces away. Wild Bull Chase lit no fire, but I could make out the figure of his horse. So I Injun-crawled to a dead locust tree and, with the pack thread I always kept in my pocket, lashed one of my pistols to a limb and bit the thread off short. Then I tied a fresh end to the trigger, cocked the pistol and, ever so carefully crawled away, looping the thread in my hand around a smooth young sapling, until all the thread was paid out. And now I was no more than ten rods from Wild Bull Chase, with the evening sun going down and the thread in my hand.

"Here, naturally, was the time to draw Chase's fire because, don't you see, a flash gives a man no time to look, so there had to be light enough for him to see the curl of the smoke. Therefore, I pulled on my thread and the tied pistol went off with a bang that sent the birds screaming. The ball must

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have passed close enough to whine, for Wild Bull Chase was down behind his horse in an instant, and he sent his rifle bullet right in the direction of where my pistol was.

"Then he looked to his own pistols and reloaded his rifle —always with his eyes in the direction from which that shot had come—while I was twenty yards closer to him before he had that ball rammed home. Now here, Lord forgive me, here was something I never have stopped being proud of, for I had been moving so like an Injun that my hand closed upon the scruff of the neck of a sleeping hare. *There* is moving quietly for you! I pitched that poor hare in Wild Bull Chase's line of vision, and she was away into the lengthening shadows in three bounds. But Chase fired at the sound and the shadow, while I crept nearer and nearer as he reloaded once again.

"I will do him this justice—he was not a coward. He tried to make himself small and crawled not backwards but forwards, little knowing that I was now less than fifteen paces behind him. But the wind changed suddenly and his horse caught my scent and whinnied, so that Chase turned with his rifle at his hip.

"Then I came up into sight, out of the grass, and said, 'Wild Bull Chase, I am the wife of the man you wantonly murdered. You have a cocked and loaded rifle in your hands and I have this pistol. Face to face, Chase, fire!'

"'Are you all alone?' he asked.

"'Yes,' said I.

"'I don't fight women,' he said.

"But I knew by his false voice that his finger was on the trigger, and I threw myself sideways. He fired.

"His ball grazed my shoulder, but mine took him in the forehead, so that he fell down dead," said the old lady.

The boy asked, avidly, "And what did you do then, Mama Fixum?"

"I turned him over with my foot and said to myself, 'Now I may weep for my husband.' And so I sat on the ground and I did. Then I mounted Wild Bull Chase's horse, because all the spirit had gone out of me, and rode back home, where I shamed them all by telling them that a half-blind young woman had hunted down and killed in fair fight this notably bad man. And there is the whole story, child. Take the jug and be off with you home."

"Mama Fixum, could I hold one of those pistols?"

"You may, child—indeed, there is only one left of that pair,

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the one I tied the thread to. The other I had buried with my husband. But it all seems a thousand years away . . . And this pistol here shall be buried with me, and much I care if they say that it's the Injun in me!"

The boy hefted the weapon and then reluctantly hung it back up again over the fireplace.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I'll come and cut your grass, Mama Fixum."

"Do, and I'll bake you a treat," the old lady said.

"Mama Fixum, will you read my future before I go?" the boy begged.

"Reading futures is for old women, child. Making futures is for young men. Give you advice, though—live by the gun and you'll die by the gun, live by the cards and you'll die by the cards, and never sit with your back to an open door. Now be off with you once and for all, for I'm tired of talking."

A number of other boys in various stages of ferocity were waiting for Jimmy when he came out in the hard-baked street. Their ringleader was fourteen years old and the biggest boy of his age in Troy Grove. He pulled Jimmy's long silken hair and, with an odiously awkward swagger and jeer, asked, "What's in that there jug, Jimmy boy?"

With a curious faraway look, the boy Jimmy closed the last three fingers of his right hand, extended the forefinger and cocked the thumb, saying, "If you ever do that again, Balfour Paltz, I'll kill you."

Unaccountably, the big boy was quelled—there was something stirring in the other's face that made all his flesh go cold.

"See here, Jimmy boy—" he began.

"You know my name. I'll thank you to call me by it." His mind was moving rapidly; he liked the nickname Wild Bull, but he did not want to be called after a murderer who fired on blind women. Clearing his throat, he said, "My name is James Butler Hickok, but from now on my personal friends may call me 'Wild Bill.'"

So the young Bill Hickok went home unmolested, carrying the jug of elderberry wine in his left hand. With the index finger of his right, he pointed at an imaginary enemy and said, "Bang! You're dead!"

With one eye shut and the other half-open, he saw, as it might be framed in the sharp V of a gunsight, an acrid and smoky sector of a thunderous and bloody destiny.

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BY WOLF MANKOWITZ

RHINOCEROS

ANOTHER glass of whisky will, if it is drunk deliberately, offer considerably more satisfaction than the first. The first he drank because it was a need, and he drank it down without thinking of its taste, the smell of it, or even very much of the effect it had on his stomach. But another glass of whisky is always quite different because only when the first has softened your mood can you relax into a good deep chair and allow the taste and the smell and the effect of the second to permeate your fatigue with an unusual sense of security.

And that is what he did. He drank down the first quickly without any other interest than that of getting rid of it; but with the second he sat down, settled deeply into a chair and allowed his senses to take stock of the drink as something which they deserved.

He watched the oily tracks on the glass when, after carefully sipping, he allowed the liquid to show its real body in the lower part. There, with light making it look the good liquor he knew it to be, he felt that in a way this glass, this second glass of whisky, was all that he had lived for; and as he moved the glass a little to one side and then to the other, knowing complete control over its slow movements, it seemed as if everything had led up to this long moment of relaxation in a deep chair with all behind him.

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As he drew the whisky into his body in a number of ways, and as its scent entered by his nostrils and he allowed it to slowly pierce towards the sensitive parts of his throat, his hand pressed the glass as if the essence of the drink was being drawn clearly into his stained fingers. But he did not light a cigarette, though the unfinished one he had rested upon the ashtray had burnt down until the still-smoking butt was burning a mark upon the polished table which would certainly be noticed when his wife returned.

For that was how it was with him now; grown out of his irresponsible youth, every little incidental to his few pleasures brought upon him the irritation reserved for the old and tired. Not that he felt his age. His finer years could not be written off as having been spent wastefully—merely sufficient to themselves. He had never neglected his body, and now the fact that he was able to smoke as much as ever he had, and drink, if anything, a little more, clearly proved that his care of himself had not been wasted. And what if he did drink a little more? When so unimportant a thing as a slight burn upon the polished top of the table was enough to bring up his failing competence in other spheres as a subject for ridicule, he was entitled to any pleasures he cared to pay for and which offered him relaxation. After all, he had worked hard enough to be able to afford the luxury of burning any piece of furniture he liked.

The smoke of the dying cigarette end touched his nostrils and he felt disgusted as it insinuated itself above the scent of the whisky. He rose from the chair and, with the unfinished drink in his left hand, picked up the butt with his right and threw it with real irritation into the brick fireplace.

As he turned away from the fireplace, he saw through the window into the garden that the dog had come in from the fields at the bottom and was idly snuffing about the hedge dividing the lawn from the little orchard in the lower half. He placed his glass upon the mantel and, with a sudden sense of pleasure at seeing the animal so aimlessly passing its time out there, opened the French windows and walked across the lawn, calling the dog to welcome him.

As a rule there was nothing which could soothe him particularly in the garden. It was as neat as the house, with everything in its proper place, the flowerbeds clean of weeds and the grass as short as it could be and all the right flowers for the time of the year growing in well-arranged profusion. There was a place for everything and that was as it should be.

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He liked it like that—the whole place as neatly turned out as the suit he wore, giving him as much smartness and groomed dignity as his age could carry. And from the middle of the lawn the house sat back comfortably, looking every inch an English country house, small but with a place for everything. It was all right enough and all exactly as he liked it. But there was nothing soothing for him in this garden and he rarely sat in it, though every day he would mention something or other to the gardener.

He slowly walked down towards the vegetable garden, the dog at his heels or running on in front of him giving an occasional excited glance back, which suggested in a friendly way that all authority for proceeding must come through the master. As for the house, he could honestly say that he was proud of the envy other people felt as they looked at its beams and its well-kept plaster, fresh paint and roses in the front garden throughout the season. But it gave him most pleasure when, spread out around his chair, it offered a sense of comfortable isolation from people who would only try to make him feel uncomfortable. When he had sat there over his second glass of whisky it was as if everything had been only for that moment of satisfaction, and in this, his most certain pleasure, he was justified for the whole of his life's expenditure.

Consequently, it was discordant to him to have to leave the glass inside the house, and with the taste of the drink quickly fading from his tongue, go outside. When he left the house it was irritation which made him momentarily forget his drink —perhaps not forget, but find it less important. It had been for that moment essential to leave a situation which could only depress him as an unfair criticism of his simple enjoyments, but now he was regretting it. Still, it was not very sensible to go into the garden and then immediately return. It was just this sort of silly indecision which he found so impossible in other people. At least he would stroll down to the bottom of the garden and then he could turn back and return to finish his drink in the comfort which he was entitled to expect.

The dog looked up towards him once as he moved across the lawn in its direction, calling it in his familiar way. It looked up at him once and its look was quite lacking in recognition, though normally one would have said that, of all the household, the dog was most attached to him. At least, so it seemed to him, for the animal would often spend an evening sitting at his feet whilst he turned a glass slowly in his hand

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thinking of the difference between the whisky of, say, the afternoon bar at the races, the club where he sometimes took lunch in Town and this, which his own supplier sent him. It was remarkable to think that there could be such a range of quality, and he felt that if one had learned in thirty years how to judge a good whisky and a possible winner in the paddock, the time had certainly not been wasted. Whisky and horses were quite as varied as men and it was sheer nonsense for anyone to pretend that it was not so. Sitting there through the evening it had seemed to him that though it was not possible to rely on a horse, you could, if you knew enough, rely on a whisky, and the dog restful at his feet suggested that he could be relied upon also. But now the dog looked at him once and turned back to his aimless snuffing and, the taste of the whisky gone from him, a sudden sense of the unreliability of everything caught him like a sharp blow in the chest, and with venom in his voice he called the dog to him again.

There seemed to be no reason why on this particular occasion his own dog—and he had brought it to the house when, as a puppy, it had for some obscure reason appealed to him—should ignore him as if he were a stranger, some sort of undistinguished passer-by for whom the animal could not be expected to alter its private arrangements. There was nothing unusual about his dress for he was as neat and as cleanly turned out as his friends expected him to be, and anyhow dogs recognised their masters by an unalterable scent to which they alone were sensitive. The animal had just suddenly turned perverse.

He had come to it in good faith, just as, too often, he had offered himself to human beings as an ordinary man of the world of no particular pretensions but knowing what he liked and believing that he had the right to enjoy those things, only to be insulted by their insistence upon other things which he could not recognise as important and rejected by their stubborn refusal to accept him on his own showing. And now this dog. It was not that he had, as some people he could name, a ridiculously sentimental attitude towards dogs, but when an animal has, without any apparent discomfort or unwillingness, sat at your feet for many evenings without nagging and without asking for anything, it was disillusioning—even to a plain man who was quite prepared to admit that it was only necessary to look after number one. But this was so completely unreasonable and anyhow, he had left his second glass of whisky in the lounge practically untouched to come out.

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He called its name again, quietly, and then, as the injustice of the situation came home to him in all its force, he shouted at the animal with all his might.

The dog looked towards him quickly and seemed to see him for the first time. The sound of his voice filled the garden and hung on the silent evening air for some moments. His voice had risen to a sharp swearing of the dog's name and then cracked, and in the quiet garden it was that cracking note which still shocked the silence while the dog turned away and ran down towards the vegetable garden and out across the field.

Whilst he stood there staring after the animal's small body, he heard someone call from the kitchen to ask if there was anything wrong.

For a moment he was not sure whether he would follow the dog or not, but then he turned suddenly and, kicking the close-cropped lawn once or twice, returned to his drink without answering.

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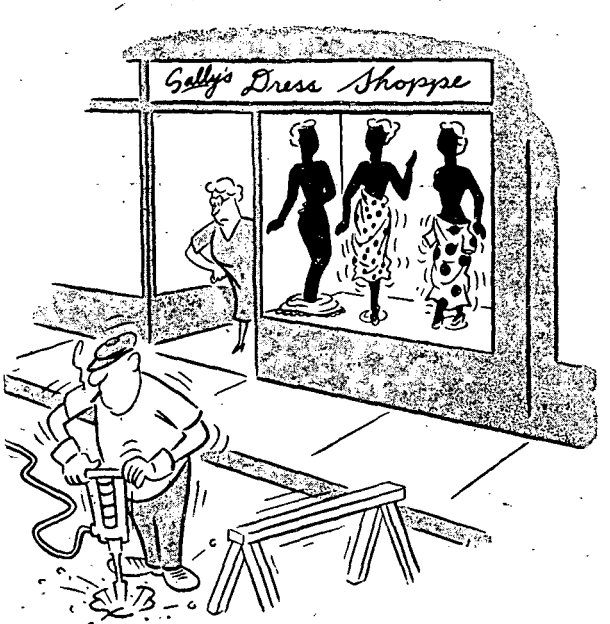

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HIGH EXPLOSIVE

The sound of a kiss is not so loud as that of a cannon, but its echo lasts a great deal longer.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Sweeter Than Wine

His hand found mine on the window-sill and, as I trembled, he leaned towards me. His hair brushed my cheek. He murmured, "Aurette!"—calling me for the first time by this pretty name, which already in his heart he had invented for me. And I answered with his name, whispering "Charles" to him, as I had so often whispered it in solitude.

His arm slid round me. A wonderful tenderness swept through me and I seemed no longer a creature of the earth. As he bent to kiss my hair, I raised my head and pressed my lips against his. That was our only kiss on this evening—our first kiss, and a declaration of what had for long been known but unavowed.

JEANNE AURELIE GRIVOLIN, *Breviary of Love, 1802*

LATE NIGHT FINAL

"May I print a kiss on your lips?" I said,
And she nodded her full permission;
So we went to press and I rather guess
We printed a full edition!

JOSEPH LILIENTHAL, *A Full Edition*

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Jenny

Jenny kissed me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in.
Time, you thief! who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in.
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad;
Say that health and wealth have missed me;
Say I'm growing old, but add—
Jenny kissed me!

J. H. LEIGH HUNT

THE BRITISH WAY OF LIFE

Faustus, if you knew all the treasures of Britain, you'd hurry over here with winged feet; and if your gout hindered you, then you'd pray to be turned into a Daedalus. Why—to mention one attraction out of many—the girls here have heavenly faces, and they are gentle, easy-mannered. You'd soon prefer them to your Muses. Besides, there's a fashion here which can't be sufficiently praised; wherever you go, everyone gives you a kiss; when you leave, you are sent off with kisses, and when you return, the sweet favours are again bestowed. Someone comes to visit you?—your health in sweet kisses! He says goodbye?—kisses again! Meet a person anywhere, and kisses abound. In fact, life is filled with these sweets. Faustus, if you could once taste them—so delicious, so fragrant—you would long to go a-travelling in England, not for ten years only, like a Solon, but to the end of your days. ERASMUS, *Letter to a Friend, 1499*

Kissing's No Sin

Some say that kissing's a sin;
But I think it's nane ava,
For kissing has wonn'd in this warld
Since ever that there was twa.

O, if it wasna lawfu'
Lawyers wadna allow it;
If it wasna holy,
Ministers wadna do it.

If it wasna modest
Maidens wadna tak' it;
If it wasna plenty,
Puir folk wadna get it.

ANON

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By Patrick Boyle

A turbulent girl disturbs the quiet country setting of this long and memorable Irish story

The Betrayers

SHE's lying down."

I never grasped the true significance of this statement until the summer I was packed off to spend the entire school holidays with my aunt Mary at Benowen Strand, near the narrows of Lough Foyle, where you could stand on the shore and see, due north, the coastline of southern Ireland. You got the impression that a good spit, with the wind behind it, would carry across the narrow neck of sea and river to that poor priest-ridden country. Aunt Mary's big old stone-built house and Willie Nesbitt's thatched cottage were the only dwellings in this tiny settlement, perched in the middle of a bleak stretch of wind-swept dunes.

It was here I first learned that "lying down" did not mean merely the assumption of a prone or horizontal position. It meant also, a closed door past which one must always tiptoe. It meant drawn blinds at mid-day in an airless bedroom. It meant my aunt's voice resolutely uncomplaining: "Leave the tray down beside the bed, Jim. And darling, *do* try to close the door quietly behind you."

She suffered from attacks of migraine, especially during hot weather and the continuous spell of sweltering sunshine that characterised that summer, kept her confined to her room most days with splitting headaches. "She's lying down" had become part of the normal routine of the house. I had long since ceased to question her prolonged absences. One of the by-products of her ill-health was that I was forced, through

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sheer boredom, to spend most of my evenings in the kitchen, with the only other occupant of the house—the maid.

This was all very well when Jane, Willie Nesbitt's sister, was the maid. But then she was a long string of pump-water, with clinker-built teeth, sallow skin and an ironed-out chest. When she went to work in England and the new girl from the County Donegal came, it was a different kettle of fish. Her name was Cassie, Cassie Moran. She arrived the same day as the piebald mare, a drunken purchase of Willie Nesbitt's.

Cassie seemed to materialise in the kitchen, without ever having gone through the process of arrival. I came on her sitting straddle-legged before the kitchen range, reading a woman's magazine. She looked up, said: "Hi!" and went back to her reading.

As for the piebald, I saw her first by torchlight as Willie, blethering away like a ha'penny book and near smothering me with the smell of porter, opened the half-door of the stable.

"I hear tell your new girl arrived the day," he said, flashing his torch on the mare. "What d'you think of her?" he asked.

I looked at the sleek exotic creature, sidling away from the beam of light, ears flattened, nostrils flared, her whole body shivering with nervous tension. "She's a proper beaut!" I said, not rightly knowing if I meant Cassie or the mare.

Next morning, in the broad light of day, you could have faulted neither of them.

The mare was a lovely creature, a skewbald actually, patched brown and white with a narrow strip of black separating the two colours. With her air of dainty elegance she had the appearance of a circus pony—a beast that no farmer in his right senses and with a proper regard for the dignity of his craft, would allow into his yard.

Cassie too, looked a thoroughbred. Small, dainty, raven-haired, she had the kind of complexion only seen on the covers of the glossier women's magazines.

Willie Nesbitt gave his verdict as we watched her carrying water back from the well: "She's a well-set-up wee cuddy, all right. As neat a pair of hocks as you'd wish to see. They're two of a kind, herself and the pony!"

And indeed it was true. Cassie never moved from place to place like an orthodox biped. She plunged. With the frisky abandon of a colt she would dart across a room or fly up the stairs, taking them two at a time. Prowling among the sand-hills, she progressed in little scuttling rushes, as though chasing

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a barking terrier. She had an animal wariness that showed in the sudden tilt of the head as she listened to some sound that only the cocked ear of a horse could discern.

For the first couple of weeks I was too busy to investigate Cassie. Every spare minute was devoted to watching Willie working on the pony. Up till now she had been treated as a pet, never broken to saddle or harness. But Willie was confident he could master her. "I'll have her drawing gravel and seaweed before the summer's out," he said.

There was every chance of it. Willie—a squat, baldy, chinless forty—who lived with his widowed mother, ran a few score of sheep and three scrawny bullocks on the surrounding warren of sand-dunes. He milked one cow and each spring he went to the moss to cut and reap his turf. He laboured a rood or so of garden which he set in main-crop potatoes, savoy cabbage and swedes. That was the extent of his farming. But he had other gifts. He could set snares, lobster pots or a long line better than anyone in the locality. He could lift a salmon out of the river under the nose of the water-bailiff. He had an old-fashioned single-barrelled shotgun that, in his hands, was every bit as accurate as the most expensive Purdey. Above all, he had an understanding of animals, especially horses, that was uncanny.

Willie felt there was one thing needed altering before he started in to break the pony to harness. To keep calling her Sally—a name that called up her pampered past—would only be a handicap. A new name was required. As usual, Willie consulted the Bible. "Sheba!" he announced at last. "That's what we'll call her. After Solomon's woman that brought him the apes and the peacocks and the Arabian horses. Yon wee pony has Arab blood in her, I'd stake my solemn oath."

So Sheba she became. But if Willie thought a change of name would effect a change of nature, he was soon proved wrong. For once the pony got used to her new owner and surroundings, she became temperamental and capricious. If thwarted, she would paw the ground, shaking her head violently till her mane rose in a crest of foam. It was the behaviour of a spoiled brat and, as an only child, I could not but admire her performance. Each morning she was released into the wire-fenced paddock beside the cottage where, after kicking up her heels and whinnying with delight, she would settle down contentedly enough to graze.

She took to the bridle with the minimum of trouble, allowing the bit to be forced between her jaws with little more than

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token resistance. Willie led her round and round the paddock at walking pace, the mare occasionally breaking into little jigging sidesteps through sheer high spirits. Once, when he stooped to tie up a trailing bootlace, she butted him playfully on the rump. Moving a pace or two away, he tried once more to knot the lace. Again Sheba butted the tempting target. He flung the reins over her head and moved away. The pony kept at his heels, her mincing gait a contrast to Willie's flat-footed slouch. When he stopped, Sheba sidled up to him, craving attention with sniffing muzzle. He started off round the paddock, Sheba still at his heels. Each time he halted, the pony went through the same nuzzling act.

Willie made a great pretence of repelling these attentions, but it was easy to see that he was delighted by the pony's show of affection. When we were stabling Sheba, he said to me: "The wee mare's bulging with brains. You can see that, Jim? There'll be no trouble in the world breaking her to harness. It's just a matter of going easy and not rushing her."

So, for a week, Willie and the pony performed their circus act each afternoon in the paddock, with Mrs. Nesbitt, Cassie and myself for audience. Mrs. Nesbitt, a bitter-tongued old wasp, gave out the pay as we stood at the gate, watching.

"Boys-a-boys, thon's a queer-looking yoke," she said, out of the side of her uptwisted toothless mouth. "I'll hould ye yon lady never cut a furrow or drew a load of dung. A plaything of the gentry, that's what she was."

"Willie says he'll have her hauling before the end of the summer," I said.

"I'm telling him to bring her back and take what he can for her. He could plead he had a sup of drink taken when he made the bargain. I don't doubt he could even law them for fraud forby."

"Maybe he's going to enter her for some of the shows. There's big prizes to be won, they say."

"Would you hould your tongue about shows. He's wasted time enough on that daft creature without you putting ideas into his head."

Cassie never spoke. She stayed watching till Willie took the bridle off the mare, then ran back to the house.

Willie tackled me about her. "You should give me a knockdown to her," he said. "When the old one's not around."

He scratched his head thoughtfully. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Jim. I'll try out the mare with the long reins in the morning. I've a notion she'll take to them. If she does, I'll

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bring her down to the strand the morrow night. Let you pass the word on to the wee cuddy."

I gave her the message that night. She was sitting, as always, hunched over the dying fire, stuck into a paper-backed romance.

Mooching around the kitchen I had rooted out a package of cream crackers and was buttering a rising column. I spoke over my shoulder: "Willie's trying Sheba out on the long reins tomorrow night. Down on the strand. He thought you might like to come."

I slapped the last of the butter on the one remaining biscuit. "D'you think would there be a hunk of cheese in the joint, Cassie?" I said. "He wants a knock-down to you," I said.

There was no answer. Flinging down the knife, I turned round. The book lay open on her lap. As I watched, a leaf swung slowly back from left to right. She made no move to turn it back.

"Is there wax in your ears?" I said. "Or are you struck dumb with longing for some silly old story-book hero?"

"There's cheese on the top shelf of the pantry, Master Jim," she said, without budging.

I moved to the back of her chair. "What's in these ruddy books, anyway, that keeps you re-reading every page as if you were revising your homework?"

I reached over her shoulder to flick back the vagrant page. Our heads were close together, her hair soft against my cheek. I froze into an attitude of attention, my outstretched fingers on the open page, repeating to myself the ridiculous words that caught my gaze: "'Love is the tenderness of the morning, not the madness of the night.'"

I kept up the pretence of literary criticism even when she turned back to speak to me and I could no longer see the book.

"What sort of a chap is he, Jimmie?" she asked, her voice purring from deep in her throat. My mouth was jammed against her cheek. I pulled back my head to reply. "Who?" a high voice, surely not my own, squeaked.

She craned farther back, so that her cheek was once more pressed against my mouth. "Don't be a silly goose. Willie Nesbitt, of course," she said. Her skin smelled of soap and rumpled pillows and the plunge-room after a match.

"Oh, he's all right," my dry lips grazed her cheek as the shameful voice croaked out a reply. I felt I was being swallowed by an exotic jungle flower from one of my science-fiction stories.

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"Has he a girl?" she persisted. "Is he in love with anyone?"

Dazed and stupefied, I could only quote the words dancing across my closed eyelids. "'Love is the tenderness of the morning, not the madness of the night,'" I said, hardly able to hear the silly words through the singing in my ears.

She swung round in her chair and faced me, her eyes all pupils, her lips puffed out like frost-stricken birds. "You're a one," she said, "you sound like a story-book."

Casually, as though I were a begging dog entitled to an encouraging pat for my cleverness, she leaned forward and kissed me full on the lips; calmly; expertly; leisurely. She got up, yawning and stretching. I stared hungrily at her tight-stretched nippled jumper. The blood hammered impatiently on my ear-drums: my insides weaved and lurched drunkenly. I felt shaky and weak. The cannibal flower had at last engulfed me, squeezing the very marrow from my bones.

"Ten o'clock," she said, making for the scullery. "The spuds still in their jackets and not a wean in the house washed."

She moved with a slow voluptuous swagger, still twisting and flexing her arms. Drugged with emotion, I slunk off. Before I closed the kitchen door she called out: "Tell your pal I go for a walk along the beach every night."

Willie was delighted when I gave him the message next day. "We'll take the pony out this evening," he said. "I tried the gear on her this morning and she was as quiet as a lamb."

Sure enough, when he took Sheba, already tackled with bridle and girth, down to the strand, she stood quietly while he tied on the rope reins and threaded them back through the metal eyes on the girth. Willie walked back the full length of the long reins, shook them gently and chirped. "Get up, Sheba!" he said softly. "Get up, honey!"

The pony's ears pricked up. Willie waited.

"Get up!" he coaxed and chirped again.

Still the pony refused to budge.

"Get up there, you silly girl! Stop acting the mohawk!" he pleaded, shaking the reins very gently in time with his words.

She started off at a brisk gait. We were forced to trot to keep up with her, until the soft sand forced her to a plodding walk. Out on the hard sand she still kept to walking pace.

Cassie was dawdling along at the edge of the tide. Long before we were near her, Willie commenced to rein Sheba in.

"Whoa there, Sheba!" he called, easing back on the reins. "Whoa, girl!"

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The pony pulled up abruptly, nearly tripping Willie up.

"She has a good mouth," he said. He was evidently disgusted at his failure to bring the mare to a halt at Cassie's side.

Cassie ignored him altogether when she reached us. She began patting Sheba's neck, rubbing her face against the pony's muzzle. "Hello, Pretty-puss!" she said. "D'you think now would Willie let me handle you?"

She looked up. "You're name's Willie, isn't it?" she said.

He reached out the reins to her. "Here you are," he said. There was a sappy grin on his face. "You've had truck with horses before?"

"Wasn't I reared on a farm in Donegal!" she said.

He stayed close to her as, furiously, she shook and plucked at the reins, urging on the unheeding pony with clicking tongue and shouts of: "Come on away! Come on away there!"

"Give over," he said at last, taking the reins from her. "You'll have her mouth torn to shreds if you keep on at that caper. You'd think you were bawling a drove of bullocks to the fair."

He turned to me. "Will you chance your hand?" he said.

No matter how I tried—chirping, wheedling, twitching the reins—I could not stir the pony to more than a toss of the head.

Cassie was disgusted. "What that Jezebel wants," she said, "is a lick of an ash-plant. That would put some of the notions out of her head."

"You'd never train Sheba that way," he said. "She's been petted too much. One belt of a stick and she'd never work for you again."

"You're too soft-hearted, Willie. My father used to say that no horse was ever rightly broken in till your name was inscribed with an ash-plant on its side."

"I never waled a horse yet. And I've put a brave few through my hands. It's wrong. Don't you know what the poet says?"

He cleared his throat and commenced to intone:

"If I had a donkey and it wouldn't go,
Would I belabour it? No! No! No!"

"You're as mad as a March hare, Willie Nesbitt. Coming out with that silly nursery-rhyme. As if there was ever an ass foaled that didn't need a proper flaking before it would budge a foot!"

It was terrible to see the abject look on Willie's face. Like a cringing mongrel set on licking the boot that kicked it.

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Before he could disgrace himself further, I handed him back the reins. "Take over yourself, Willie," I said.

It was uncanny. One chirp and Sheba was off again. No coaxing, no fuss. And once more Willie assumed dignity and authority.

For an hour he schooled the pony up and down the strand, concentrating solely on starting off and pulling up. As soon as she showed signs of ignoring his signals, he untied the reins. "We'll knock off," he said. "No use working on her when she's getting browned off."

"You have the patience of Job," Cassie said. "I don't know how you keep your temper with that saucy madam."

With outstretched neck the pony sniffed and nuzzled at Cassie's face. "Don't be trying to get round me, you old plaster," she said, scratching Sheba's forehead. "You'll not find me as soft as your boss."

We started back up the strand with the mare pacing sedately behind, Willie holding forth non-stop.

"If you lift a hand in anger to a spoiled article the like of Sheba, you're goosed. You'd be well advised to sell her to the first man puts a price on her, for she'll never do a day's work for you. No! This wee mare has got to be convinced that you're a class of a god—a decent kindly god that wouldn't rake her ribs with thunderbolts or start swearing at her out of the sky."

By this time we were out on the metalled road.

"I'll leave yous and love yous!" said Cassie, branching off for the house.

Willie caught his breath. "Eh?" he said.

"I'll maybe run into you the morrow night if you're below on the strand schooling the pony," she called back.

While we were brushing down the mare Willie kept coming back to her last remarks. "Did you hear what she said? She made a date for the morrow night. Isn't that what it amounts to, Jim? Eh? And what d'you think of her saying: 'I'll love you and leave you'? That sounds good, doesn't it? We'll have to be out on the strand brave and early to not miss her."

I never in my life heard such mushy talk. The silly smirk on his face sickened me about proper. On top of everything didn't he say to me as I left: "Put in a good word for me will you, Jim? Like a decent man."

When I got as far as the kitchen, Cassie was sitting, book on lap, as if she had never moved since the previous night.

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"He's a gas man, the bould Willie," she started off immediately. "He thinks of nothing but his blooming old pony. I thought he would never stop talking about her. Does he never go with girls, Jimmie?" she asked.

Hands gripping the back of her chair, I was leaning over her in what I hoped was the correct attitude of a practised libertine. I said: "You've nice curly hair, Cassie. Is it all your own?" My voice sounded normal enough, but I was breathing like a beaten runner.

"Find out for yourself, Mr. Curious Cat. And don't forget what happened to *him* when he became inquisitive!"

With the outstretched fingers of one hand, I started combing through the curls on the back of her neck, watching them coil up again like the little furry caterpillars we call Hairy Mollies.

"Why are you always asking after Willie?" I said. "Have you a notion of him?"

She shook her head free. "It's queer notions I'd be having, falling for the likes of him!" she said. "Sure I suppose his old mother wouldn't let him look at a girl?"

"If Willie brought a girl into her kitchen, Mrs. Nesbitt would split her with the tongs," I said.

I reached down and turned back the page of the book, as I had done the previous night. "You're not making much headway with your homework," I said.

She twisted round, grinning. "Maybe you should give me a hand with it," she said.

This time I did not wait for her to take the initiative. Closing my eyes, I made a grab.

Cassie squealed and fended me off. "Are you trying to pull the head off me?" she said, rubbing her neck. "D'you think you're bottling a calf or what? You'd be the better for a little practice," she said. I could feel my face burning.

"Put your hands behind your back!" she commanded.

I did so.

"Now!" she said, leaning back, eyes closed, mouth puckered.

There I stood, bolted to the ground with shame, until she opened her eyes. The mocking curl of her lips shrivelled up the remains of my self-respect.

She jumped up from the chair. "Nine o'clock. Better for me to ready the supper," she said.

As she passed me on her way to the pantry, she suddenly flung her arms round my neck, kissed me and whispered in my ear: "I must keep in with Jimmie, mustn't I? It's not fair to be teasing him."

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Before I had time to gather my wits, my aunt's voice called from the stairs: "Jim! Where are you?".

"I'm here, Aunt Mary. In the kitchen."

"Don't be staying up late, now. You know your mother warned you not to!"

Cassie turned at the pantry door, pointed dramatically at the calling voice and whispered: "He shouldn't be collogueing with the kitchen staff, should he, ma'am?" She stuck out her tongue derisively.

Aunt Mary's voice came again, farther up the stairs: "You could bring up the supper. It will save Cassie the trouble."

There was the faint sound of a closing door. Cassie whistled—a long sibilant tribute. "She's got you taped, Master Jimmie. I'll better give you the tray before she comes down and takes you up by the ear."

As she opened the kitchen door for me she said: "Tell Silly Billy I was asking for him," and in a whispered rush of words: "D'you think could he ever be prised loose from that old vampire of a mother of his?"

The next few weeks are blurred with a haze of happiness. All my time seems to have been divided between Sheba and Cassie, though I must have gulped down three meals a day and bathed, fished and explored much as usual. Willie, drawing turf from the moss with a borrowed horse, was busy till tea-time so I had Sheba to myself all day. I spent hours in the paddock, trying to coax the pony to do for me the things she would do so freely for Willie. I would give a finger-whistle every bit as shrill and curt as Willie's. The pony would merely lift her head, look at me with disinterest and go back to her grazing.

When, after lengthy stalking, she allowed herself to be caught, there was no doubt of her affectionate response to my petting. Yet halter her and she would neither lead nor drive. She would graze her way round the paddock, attached to me by a dangling rope. At the slightest pull of the halter, up would go her head in the effort to tear the rope from my fist. Never was I permitted any control over her movements.

Cassie had no better luck. She would stand at the gate coaxing and cajoling. The pony only lifted her head when Cassie's voice rose to a shout.

It was different when Willie put in an appearance after ricking his last load of turf for the day. Before ever he reached the gate of the paddock, the mare's head was up and she was whinnying with excitement. Still, she never stirred till Willie

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whistled her up. Sometimes he kept her waiting deliberately, perhaps lifting his fingers to his mouth to deceive her, until he had her pawing the ground with impatience. Then, at the sound of the liberating whistle, she would break into a gallop and finish up snorting into Willie's face.

She was becoming accustomed to the daily schooling on the strand. Already she had mastered the signals for starting and halting. She would stand motionless for minutes on end waiting for the chirp or the twitch of the reins that would start her off again along the strand. Willie was confident he would have her working in harness before the summer was up.

Cassie joined us every night she could get away. She always fell in on Willie's free side and always the conversation opened in the same stilted, ceremonious manner.

"Well! How are times, Cassie?"

"Not so bad. And how is it with yourself?"

"Can't complain. A body must take the rough with the smooth."

"Aye! True for you, Willie. You might as well keep the good side turned out."

You would think they had not seen each other in six months. We would tramp along in silence behind Sheba for a while, but before long the harping would start.

"How's your mother, Willie?"

"Oh, as well as can be expected. She's a hardy old warrior, that one."

"She's getting no younger, though. She should be taking it easy at her time of life. It's a mystery to me how she keeps going!"

"Och, she manages well enough. It would take a lot to put *her* on her back."

"I don't know. An old woman is no manner of use round a farmhouse. It takes a sturdy young country girl to get the work done."

Cassie was always getting herself worked up about the hard lot of the old people. "It's a crying shame, that's what it is. Old creatures the like of your mother, forced to slave on where even a working horse'd have been put out to pasture."

At this stage Willie generally produced a bar of chocolate or a bag of sweets. While Cassie was munching he would explain: "No use in wasting your sympathies on that old hairpin. Sure she might as well be out in pasture for all she's doing."

Cassie was not going to be down-sayed by this class of talk.

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She harped on: "Isn't that just what I'm trying to tell you? A man come to your time of life should have his family reared instead of being still tied to his mother's apron-strings. You should think shame of yourself, Willie Nesbitt!"

At this Willie would shake the reins. "Get up there, Sheba! The women get the last word, don't they, girl?"

Stabling the mare he always quizzed me about Cassie: "How old do you think is she? Would she have a boy of her own back in County Donegal? Do you think would she be a steady girl that would settle down on a farm?"

Silly questions like these get my goat. I told him he had a right to ask Cassie himself and not be trying to use me to ferret out information for him.

"I just thought you might know," he said. "You and she being so pack."

I let that pass.

"Don't forget to keep her in mind of me, Jim. D'you hear now?"

"I'm never done talking to her about you," I said.

"I know that. You're a good pal."

Sure enough we talked about him, Cassie and I. And about Sheba and old Mrs. Nesbitt. There was little else to talk about.

To be exact we did little talking. Most of our time was spent huddled over the kitchen range, acting out a charade that never got farther than the first syllable. In bed each night, I planned its completion in a whirlwind seduction based on the scanty lore picked up at school from my fellow neophytes. Yet it only required a mild rebuke from Cassie: "Where d'you think you're going with no bell on your bike?" to quell my cravings.

When my cowardly hands had surrendered their hard-won advantage and I had resumed my role as disinterested friend or bored voluptuary, she would close the book and say: "I doubt they teach you more than your manners at school, Master Sly-boots, judging by your old-fashioned habits."

The truth was, the stakes were too high. It meant risking my present small but certain happiness for the possibility of becoming a figure of distinction among the braggarts of the school jakes. And so, content enough with short rations, I made do with the small coinage of love—the strokings and nuzzlings and sudden casual pounces of affection that sent me reeling to bed when Aunt Mary called me.

Every night the call seemed to come earlier and from a

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lower step, so that I kept my ears cocked for the creaking stair that would be the last warning of her approach.

Before I left for bed Cassie always said something like: "Give the bronco-buster my love." Or: "Tell Romeo that he has me put to loss with his attentions."

Always I replied: "Fat lot of use that would be! All Willie cares about is the pony. And his old mother, of course."

The coming of the policeman with the census papers changed the routine of our ways. He stood for a solid hour talking to Cassie at the kitchen door—a tall young fellow, smiling and very sure of himself, hardly bothering to use the sheaf of census papers as an excuse.

That night, instead of giving me a message for Willie before I left the kitchen, Cassie said: "What d'you think of Herbie?"

"Herbie who?" I said.

"Herbie Gibson, of course—the fellow doing the census."

"Is it that peeler you were gassing to at the door? You weren't long worming the Christian name out of him!"

"I could hardly call him 'Constable Gibson' and him mad to square me for a date!"

"Do you mean to say he was trying to date you up and you only after meeting him?"

"He has me asked out for the morrow night. D'you think should I chance my arm and go out with him?"

"Well, if you are badly in need of exercise, a night on police patrol might limber you up."

"Quit the codding Jimmie and pay attention!"

She was leaning towards me, scowling with the effort of concentration. "Do you know what it is?" she said, speaking very fast. "I'll go clean daft if I have to stay any longer cooped up in here every night. Sitting waiting for your friend, Willie, to pluck up the courage to ask me out. If I don't make a move very shortly I'll find myself sitting on the shelf."

She paused for breath.

"If I went out with Herbie a couple of nights," she went on; "do you think would it put the skids under Willie? There must be some way to get him out of his pooshey habits."

My mouth was so dry I could not answer at once. Eventually I managed to say in a breathless croak: "Willie is so taken up . . . breaking in the pony . . . that he'll never notice . . . that you're gone. Or who you're gone with."

"Oh, it will come to his notice all right. Trust that scheming old mother of his to nose it out and dish it up to him for breakfast, dinner and tea."

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"But isn't that what you want?"

"Och, you don't understand. What really matters is *who* he hears it from."

She eyed me with the steady, tilted gaze of a bird. "Now if *you* were to tell him it would be different," she said. "You could give it the right twist."

"There would be no need of any of this hunker-sliding if you were to give that Herbie guy the brush-off."

"But maybe I want to go out with him. After all he is a bit more exciting than cagey Willie. What do you think, Jimmie? Will I chance it?"

I tried to moisten my lips with the strip of linoleum that was once my tongue. When I spoke I found myself gobbling with rage. "Little-heed-you'll-pay-to-any-advice-you-get." I drew in breath. "You'll just do what suits your sweet self." I managed to break off without adding: No matter who it hurts.

Cassie flung her arms round me, murmuring: "Is Mummy's darling feeling cranky? Perhaps Sugar-plum has wind in his poor wee tum-tum?"

She commenced to pat my back and make clucking noises. Aunt Mary's call saved me from further indignity. I broke free. As I started up the stairs, she put her head round the kitchen door. "Psst!" she beckoned urgently. I leaned over the banisters. "Don't forget to tell Willie my side of the story."

For the next three days Willie had me deeved with inquiries about Cassie. "What sudden notion has she taken to go walking into the village every night? Could it be she's fashed about something? Maybe it's because the pony won't take to her?" On the fourth day he heard the news.

I was helping Willie clean out the byre when Mrs. Nesbitt came to the door. She stood watching us in silence, a humpy old witch, with crying red eyes and long grey hairs straggling over lips and chin, mumbling away at her toothless gums like a horse munching hay. At last she piped up: "Postman's been!"

Willie ignored her and went on with the work.

"Letter from your sister. Four pages of excuses for not sending home any money. She was aye one for putting on the poor mouth."

Willie grunted.

"Postman says he saw your friend Miss Fly-by-night walking the road with a polisman. I'll hould you it was the young

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blade was round with the tally sheets. He was chatting her for the best part of an hour the day he was here."

Stupidly Willie stared at her, the dung-laden sprong, lifted to waist level, shedding its load unheeded.

Mrs. Nesbitt went on: "These mountainy young ones are woeful easy carried away. I dare swear nothing less than a uniform will do her now. She'll be too big in her boots for the likes of a small farmer any more."

She waited, munching furiously. Willie screwed up his eyes as if he had stared too long at the sun.

"They say in the village," she continued, "that thon young polisman is the right blackguard. Does nothing from dawn to dusk but follow women. He's put down for poling Martha Fleming, yon sappy creature from the Crooked Bridge that finished up in the mental office. It's to be feared she's not the only silly young goose that'll be forced to hatch out that young fellow's goslings." She turned back to the house.

Willie spat on his hands and commenced forking dung furiously. "We'll start ringing Sheba this evening," he said.

For the next fortnight he worked on the pony for a couple of hours every night. He would start Sheba up the strand. After a hundred yards or so he would put the pressure on one rein. Gently: steadily: he coaxed the pony until he had her wheeling around full circle, with himself as hub. Pivoting so that he always faced her, he signalled his instructions, calling or chirping, getting his results with an economy of effort that never failed to thrill me. A spell of walking, cantering, trotting, all in the same direction and he straightened out the mare once more. Again he gradually eased her round till he was ringing her in the opposite direction. Behind us we left a string of ploughed-up circles for the incoming tide to wash away.

During all this time Cassie never appeared. Each evening after tea she would slip off up the road in the direction of the village. I have no idea what time she sneaked back. There was never anyone in the kitchen when I collected Aunt Mary's supper tray.

When I tried to speak to her between meals, she kept dashing about, plunging from kitchen to pantry, scullery to washhouse, banging saucepans, clattering delf, running taps—a picture of dedicated industry marred only by the all-too-frequent pauses—standing perhaps over the scullery sink, plate in one hand, dripping cloth in the other, staring into the distance, the corners of her mouth quirked up in the beginnings

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of a smile, whether in recollection or anticipation I never waited to find out.

Meanwhile Willie, hurt at Cassie's continued absence, no longer ringed the pony within sight of the entrance to the strand as he had done the first days she stayed away. Instead, he took Sheba to the Long Strand, a deserted beach a good mile round the Point.

Here, with no sound but the soft padding of hoofs, the occasional ring of metal as the pony shook the bridle, the gasping of wavelets as they collapsed in exhaustion on the sand, Sheba circled the pair of us.

Her madly heraldic appearance as she paced around with determined thrusting head and high-stepping hoofs, her cream and gold skin gleaming like porcelain, the furious sweep of her long tail lashing her fly-tormented flanks: all these things combined to lull me into a speechless stupor. Willie too, must have been affected the same way, for only when he had Sheba straightened out between rings did he speak. Bitter complaining talk.

"She's a lazy lump, that one," he would say of his mother. "Scrooging over the fire all day, with her muzzle cocked into the heat like a crippled old hound. Wouldn't rise off her hip to get you a sup of tea. A man has a poor time in a house the like of that, I can tell you. There's no fear of him bursting his breeches with the burden of food he'll have to contend with. And to crown and complete all, there she is the day long, sitting in the corner chawing and champing at her gums till it would put you mad with the hunger looking at her."

Or he would start giving off about the police, never singling out any particular officer. "They are a nosy lot of boys, those. Aye sniffing around after something. If it's not tail-lights on bicycles or the lack of a dog licence, it's the poaching. Plowtering along the brew of the river at all times of the day or night. You'd wonder what they expect to find when you would hear the clatter of them a mile away. Cute hawks, too. Catch one of them jokers marrying a girl in service! Not likely. It's a school-teacher or someone the like of that they want, with a job and a bit of money in the bank. You'd wonder the young cuddies haven't them taped long since."

Never once did he mention Cassie.

He did not take out his bitterness on the pony. In fact, he was even more gentle and tolerant with her. It seemed to me he had come to rely on Sheba's affection as a prop for his tottering self-esteem. Each day at the paddock gate the pony's

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boisterous welcome, once a casually-accepted tribute, became a more and more necessary demonstration of love and loyalty, and her ready obedience—a proof of devotion, not of intelligence. Perhaps that was how it was, for though Sheba refused to work for me, in less than three weeks' schooling Willie had her weaving from side to side at the slightest pressure of the reins and obeying his reiterated: "Back up there, girl!" without ever squinting round in distrust.

At last a day came when Willie was able to announce: "It's time the mare was put hauling. She is well enough mouthed by now. We'll try her out in the paddock this afternoon when I get back from stripping the snares I set last night up at the shooting lodge."

"Why the paddock?" I asked.

"The strand is too heavy going. She might only lose heart," he said.

I was so excited I rushed off at once to tell Cassie. She was in the kitchen making an apple pie for the dinner. I stood watching the deft hands knead and roll out the pastry on the bake-board. Her sleeves were pushed up, her bare arms dusted with flour so that the fine hair stood up in a white fuzz.

She looked round. "Has the cat run away with your tongue?" she said. "I thought by the way you rushed in here that you were bursting with news."

Face flushed and beaded with perspiration from the heat of the kitchen, she stared at me. I could feel the blood swishing round my head, thudding in my ears like the plunger of a churn. I ran an arid tongue round my mouth.

"You should come to the paddock this afternoon," I said. "Willie is going to try the pony out hauling."

She turned back to the bake-board, lifted the flattened pastry and draped it over the apple-filled dish like you'd spread out a wet bathing-suit to dry on the rocks.

"What's wrong with Willie Nesbitt delivering his own invites?" she said. "He has not spoken a civil word to me these two weeks."

With a knife she trimmed the fringe of hanging pastry, shaped it into narrow strips, and set about decorating the pie-top.

"Willie did not send me," I said. "I just thought you would like to see Sheba working, now she is properly broken in. You used to like watching once . . . before you . . ."

Cassie lifted the pie-dish and brushed past me to the range. I waited for the clang of the oven door shutting.

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"Well," I said. "Seeing that you helped to train Sheba—"

Cassie laughed. "Who do you think you're codding?" she said. "Sure the pony never paid a bit of heed to me."

"You will come anyway, won't you, Cassie?"

Behind me, I heard her move. Her bare arms, warm and sweet-smelling, were wound round my neck. She whispered, her lips tickling my ear: "I'm sorry, Jimmie. I won't be able. It's my afternoon off. I have to go into the village to do a bit of shopping.

"Honestly," she added.

I broke free from the coaxing arms.

"I may get back in time," she called after me.

"Back in time!" I shouted before I slammed the kitchen door. "That will be the day to go down in history."

Dinner over, I went down to the beach. The tide was far out, the sand mucked up with dead jellyfish. I gave up the idea of bathing, climbed a dune overlooking the paddock and scraped out a cool trough for myself in the roasting sand.

It was the hottest day of the summer. Oily whorls of heat, swaying and twisting like tendrils of seaweed, reared up from the baked ground. Everything you looked at shivered, as if reflected in rippling water.

Below, in the paddock, Sheba stood listlessly, head drooping, tail swishing feebly. An old sheep-dog of Willie's cowered under a farm cart, tail and lolling tongue flat to the ground. Belly-deep in the tide, a trio of wretched bullocks faced out to sea, cudgelled to exhaustion by the drover-blows of the sun. The sea, flat and milk-white, was tracked by a stretch of leaping sparks as though swept by the flames of a welding-lamp. A world of torpor.

Yet I had but to close my eyes and all was seething, clamorous life. Overhead, a plague of larks with their shrill, interminable monologues. Sea birds screeching, wailing, moaning. A solitary corn-crake clearing its throat monotonously. In the background, a throbbing drone of insects.

Sleepily I lay, chin knuckle-propped, soaking up the warmth. I watched Cassie, fresh and cool in a lemon frock, set off up the road to the village, breaking into little spurts of running like a wagtail and later I kept my blinking sun-sodden eyes open long enough to see Willie start off across the sand-hills, fresh snare wire coiled round his neck, a bunch of rabbit traps slung from one shoulder.

I woke up dazed with the sun and made off for the shelter

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of the house. From room to room I prowled, opening doors and cupboards, leafing through family photograph albums of trapped and glaring relatives, reading old letters that told, in the same scrupulous fashion, of weather or holidays: sickness or death. I read the titles of the sober leather-bound volumes in the bookcase: shook, without much hope, the locked drawer of my aunt's writing-desk: examined the hallmarks on silver, the pottery marks on china. I took a swig of sherry from the opened bottle in the liquor cabinet.

There remained one room I had never yet rummaged. Taking off my sandals, I started up the stairs, taking them in quick rushes of three or four steps at a time, being careful to avoid treading on the creaking ones. Cassie's room was at the end of the corridor, beyond the closed door of my aunt's room. To reach it, I had to negotiate a stretch of loose floorboards—one so noisy that the cat used to flinch when it padded over it.

I stuck close to the wall, balancing against it with my finger-tips, trying to creep along as close to the skirting-boards as possible. I went flat-footed, placing the advancing foot down gently, slowly easing the body weight on to it, ready to shift back to the other foot at the slightest sound.

Teeth clenched, breath held in, I sidled past Aunt Mary's room, taking advantage of every cough or rattling bedspring that would cover the sound of my progress.

At Cassie's door, I gripped the handle with both hands and turned it very, very gently till it would move no farther, all the time pulling the door towards me so that the latch could move soundlessly.

At last I pushed inwards. The door gave. It was unlocked.

The curtains were drawn back from the open window: sunlight and the tang of seaweed filled the room. An iron bed, a chair, a table with ewer and wash-basin, a curtained alcove: that was the extent of the furnishings. Yet nothing was left lying around. A line of shoes was arranged neatly under the wash-stand, whose four corners held—like rooks on a chess-board—a covered soap-dish, a glass containing toothpaste and brush, a plastic hairbrush and comb, both scrupulously clean, a folded face-cloth with the nailbrush placed in the exact centre. A suitcase was pushed under the bed.

Quietly I slid it out. It too, was unlocked.

There was just time enough to note the neatly-folded underclothes and the transparent plastic bag with its meagre reserve of rolled-up nylon stockings before my aunt's voice put an end to my ferret-work.

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"Cassie!" she called. "Is that you?"

Under cover of her repeated calls, I pushed back the suitcase, scuttled out of the room, leaving the door ajar and padded to the head of the stairs, where I faced down and cried: "Commmm-ing!" I dragged the word up from the back of my throat and tried to make it sound as if it was rising from the staircase well.

Waiting a few seconds, I marched up the corridor, burst open my aunt's door and poked my head into the room. "Were you calling?" I said.

The huge darkened room, with its high canopied bed and littered furnishings seemed close and oppressive after the bright austerity of Cassie's room.

"Oh, is that you, Jim?" she said. "I thought Cassie was back. I could have sworn I heard her moving about in her room."

She was sitting up in bed, pillow-propped, a green bed-jacket draped round her shoulders. Her hair, that I had discovered to be really bronze, was fluffed out madly over the pillows and she stared at me with such wide-eyed tragic intensity that I had to restrain an impulse to pull away the pillows and let her roll stiffly back with rattling eyeballs clicking shut and chest bleating: *Maaa-maaa!*

"Darling," she said, "would you mind terribly bringing me up a glass of milk? My throat is parched."

I must have moved into the room slightly for she suddenly said: "What is the idea of the bare feet? Were you snooping around again?"

"The sandals were hurting me," I said, making off as quick as I could.

I was worried. Aunt Mary was as cute as a cut cat and I did not relish the way she said: "Again." Going downstairs, I tried to figure out a way to distract the probing I was almost certain to get.

The inspiration came to me as I was buckling on my sandals in the hall. Aunt Mary was due to the special treatment reserved for visitors. So when I returned to her room I carried a tray containing the sherry bottle, a wine-glass and a plate of digestive biscuits.

"They say a change is as good as a rest," I said, edging out space for the tray amongst the jars and bottles on the bedside table.

"Our science master," I said, "is always preaching that nature intended cow's milk for calves."

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Aunt Mary was transformed. She was suddenly young and pretty, the lines of fret and worry swallowed up by a cheeky schoolgirl grin.

She said: "I am not a science teacher but I know it reflects on the quality of one's hospitality if a guest must sup alone. Run down, darling and bring up another glass."

So I found myself sitting on the edge of the bed, sipping sherry and munching biscuits, whilst my aunt chattered on and on about her schooldays, dreamily at first, but soon with increasing bitterness and I watched her grow old again and the edge creep into her voice and I wondered could I get away before she started reefing me.

I was just getting to my feet when she said: "How often must I tell you, Jim, that you should not sit on the edge of a bed."

I eased myself up, trying to ignore the peevish protests of the mattress.

"You know perfectly well it is bad for the springs. You could even damage the base. I'm always warning Cassie about that."

Here we go, I thought. Next stop—Paul Pry-land.

"And when we are on that subject," she continued, "I would be thankful if you would spend less of your time in the kitchen. You have been haunting it ever since Cassie came."

I smothered a sigh of relief. As Willie would put it—better bad than worse. Aunt Mary had spat up a bone that must have been stuck in her throat these many weeks past.

I said: "I don't know when I was talking to Cassie last. She has been out every night for the past three weeks. God knows where she goes to!" What matter how many roosters I put crowing by my denials. It was a case of: "Man mind thyself, woman do thou likewise." And Cassie was well able to do that.

Aunt Mary was off again: "Too much familiarity—that is how the best of maids are spoiled. They must be taught to keep their distance. Be polite and considerate to them, of course, but beyond that—"

She eyed me significantly.

"Yes, Aunt Mary," I said civilly, wondering to myself what hare she was trying to rise.

"It is a bad thing for two persons of very different states of life to become over-friendly. It leads inevitably to the moral corruption of one or the other."

Well! Well! So I was caught out at last. Aunt Mary had

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unmasked the irresistible seducer who was preying on the kitchen staff. Corrupting an innocent country girl with hardly enough sense to come in out of the rain. What a pity it was not true! Still, no-one could accuse me of not trying. I shut my eyes tightly, not to avoid my aunt's accusing gaze, but to close out the shameful picture of my defeat and disgrace.

My aunt's voice went on relentlessly: "You know perfectly well that while you are in this house I am responsible to your mother for your moral welfare. What *are* you making silly monkey faces about?"

She belched gently.

"Excuse me!" she said.

"It must be the sherry wine," I said, opening my eyes. "I feel dizzy."

She was dabbing her mouth daintily with the edge of the sheet. "I am not going to allow you—oh, thank you!" she said, as I heeled up the bottle into her waiting glass. "I cannot allow you to be demoralised by a shameless chit of a girl from the wilds of Donegal."

I could hardly believe my ears. Here was I, after wearing myself out trying to debauch my aunt's maid, being held up as a model of Christian virtue and decorum, whilst Cassie—

"Aunt Mary," I said, "you have got Cassie figured out all wrong."

My speech seemed curiously thick. I tried to scrape away with my tongue the biscuit grit clogging my mouth. "She is no piece of cake, believe you me—"

This was not what I meant to say at all. I started again: "She is the sort of girl—"

How could I ever civilise the scurrilous language used at school to describe a tease who manages to remain an unrepentant virgin?

"She's . . . She's . . ." I gave up.

Aunt Mary was watching me, her face gone all mushy and wet-eyed.

"You are a good boy, Jim," she said. "A loyal honourable boy." She belched again—without apology. "But I am afraid we may have to send Miss Cassie back to her native haunts if she does not mend her ways."

"Listen, Aunt Mary, I'm trying to tell you—"

What was I trying to tell her, anyway? That by a system of trial and error I had proved Cassie to be a modest virtuous girl, worthy of respect and capable of exercising the franchise in a manner befitting her station in life? That I was a clumsy,

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bungling operator, unlikely to bring to ruin the silliest, most susceptible pinhead of a kitchen maid? Or that—

"You could not do it!" I burst out. "You could not possibly kick Cassie out just because the two of us were civil to each other?"

Aunt Mary's eyebrows rose. "If I have to let Cassie go," she said, "it will be because I consider her unsuited for the job. Morally unsuited," she said.

This groundless accusation had to be rebutted.

"Aunt Mary," I said. "Cassie is a good girl, as straight as a die."

I squirmed at the pompous words, so like a grudging testimonial. Surely I could do better. "A finer girl you could not meet. Not if you were to scour the country from end to end."

Insincerity oozed from this declaration. What could I say that would have the bite of truth? "If you sack Cassie on my account, I'll not stay a day in the house after she goes."

Unmoved at my ultimatum, Aunt Mary put her empty glass back on the tray and commenced picking biscuit crumbs from the sheet. Without looking up she said: "You must, of course, do as you see fit, Jim. But I think you are carrying loyalty a little too far."

She was now picking crumbs from inside the neck of her night-dress. She so resembled an industrious monkey, crouched in concentration in a corner of its cage, that I could not help giggling. Glancing up, she caught my eye. Immediately we were both gathered up in helpless laughter, though what Aunt Mary was laughing at, God alone knows. We hooted and shrieked and wheezed. We swayed to and fro with shaking shoulders. In a frenzy of delight we pointed at each other's face, twisted up and streaming with tears. Doubled up in pain, we clutched our aching sides.

Each time I tried to stop, Aunt went rooting around after another crumb, starting me off again worse than ever.

At length Aunt Mary managed to gasp out, between fits of coughing: "You'll be the death . . . of your poor old Auntie . . . with your crazy fooling." She pointed to the tray. "Take down those things and put them away. And don't forget to wash the glasses!"

I stood looking down at her, unable to muster the energy—or perhaps the courage—to take up once more my defence of Cassie. I picked up the tray.

"You do not have to stay cooped up in the house just

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because of me, darling," my aunt said, as I moved to the door.

It was now late afternoon. When I went outside, my eyes winced at the glare of the sun. The heat and clamour of the day seemed intensified, the high-pitched raucous sounds of summer drilling into my skull. I started to walk towards the paddock, dragging my sandals on the dusty ground, too uncaring to shake out the pebbles that gathered under toes and heels.

To my surprise, Willie was working at an old sawn-off tree-stump that lay, smothered in rank grass and weeds, in a corner of the paddock.

"You're back early," I said.

He did not look up. "So 'twould seem," he said, the words sizzling like tobacco spits landing in the heart of a turf fire. "Gimme a hand with this."

He had wound one end of a long chain round the crutch of the V-shaped log. I strained against the timber arms whilst he tightened a running noose on the chain.

"That'll hold well enough now," he said, still in the same sour tone. "We'll try Sheba out hauling this old baulk of timber."

He picked out the swingle-tree from the harness heaped nearby, hooked it up to the end of the chain and placed it carefully on the ground so that the chain was at full stretch.

"Now!" he said, straightening up and putting his fingers to his mouth. At once Sheba, grazing in pretended indifference at the far end of the paddock, flung up her head.

Willie ignored her. Rooting among the harness, he lifted the bridle and shook it violently, as though rattling a tambourine. At the jangling of the metal bit the pony's ears pricked up. She pawed the ground with a fore-foot.

When the shrill whistle came at last, Willie was nearly knocked over by the butting, nuzzling, impatient animal. His face was wet with slobber but the sour look had gone from it. He rubbed his cheek against the pouting muzzle. I heard him mutter: "A body would fare better sticking to his friends. Wouldn't he, girl?"

Without fuss or bother he slipped on the bridle, forced the bit into the pony's mouth, pulled the head-strap over her ears, tightened up the throat-band.

"How many rabbits did you get?" I asked.

"Hold her by the bridle now," he said, "and don't let her stamp on my corns."

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With that surly voice, it was a walking certainty that the fox had beaten him to the snares.

"I saw a flight of mallard yesterday up at the wee lake," I said. "Did you see any sign of them?"

Gripping the bridle-strap, I steadied the pony's head while Willie fitted and strapped on collar and hames. He worked smoothly and swiftly.

"Did you rise any game at all?" I persisted.

He was now tying the rope reins. "A brace," he said.

"Pity you hadn't the gun with you. You might have got a shot at them."

He broke off threading the rope-end through the metal ring on the hames. He looked at me over the mare's neck.

"They were sitting targets," he said. "It wouldn't have been right to shoot them."

"Sitting targets?" I repeated.

"Aye," he said. "A brace of love-birds." He spoke quite softly, in a voice loaded with bitterness.

"Where did you come on them?" I asked. Right well I knew what he was driving at.

"Bring over the back-band and the traces while I finish off this job," he said.

When I came back, the reins were neatly coiled over the peak of the hames. I watched whilst he slipped the narrow leather back-band over the pony's back, working it to and fro till he was satisfied with its position.

"Where were they?" I demanded.

Sheba started stamping impatiently with a hind-hoof.

"Get up to the mare's head," he said. "Do you want her to make a shambles of my feet?"

I went back to holding the pony's bridle but my imagination was ranging the length and breadth of the district.

"Were they in the hunting lodge?" I whispered.

Willie had picked up the traces. Quickly he moved round the pony, clipping the chain-rings to the hooks on hames and back-band. He did not answer till he was back at the far side of the mare, with the traces hooked up in readiness for hauling. Once more he faced me over the neck of the horse.

"Where else but in yon derelict hut would they get cover for their dirty capers?" he said. He was staring at me blindly, his eyes busy on their work of reconstruction.

"I heard the noise and me passing the hut and I pushed back the shutter a piece to see what it was. There they were, as God is my judge, lying out full stretch with nothing between

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them and the floorboards but a length of dirty old sail cloth. Not a stitch of clothes on the pair of them, no more than on the shameless heathen, coupling like animals in the jungles of Africa. I tell you . . ."

Willie's disclosure came like a blow in the stomach, leaving me breathless, sickened, numb. I broke in on his tirade: "If you only got a glimpse of them passing the window, you might very easily be mistaken."

"There was no mistake about it. Amn't I telling you I stood at the window looking in at them."

"But sure they must have seen you?"

"They were too busy with their wicked antics to bother about me."

I tried one last question. A forlorn hope. "How are you so sure it was Cassie?"

"Wouldn't I know her yellow dress a mile away? And the policeman's tunic flung across the stern of the old duck-boat? Yon man's only half-human, that's what he is. With a mane of hair as thick as a badger's running down the small of his back."

The vision this evoked was too horrifying to credit. I let go of the bridle and stood back.

"Look here, Willie Nesbitt," I said, "it's a bloody shame telling this vicious pack of lies about Cassie. She's a stranger here with no-one to stand up for her. You are only making up this lousy rotten story to get your own back on her because she would not go out with you."

"I'm not saying a word against . . ." He scratched his head in agitation.

He began again: "You've had no truck with girls. You don't understand these things."

He shook his head violently as though trying, like Sheba, to dislodge the cloud of flies now swarming about us. The pony —ears gesticulating madly, mane and tail in constant furious motion, her flanks a crawling, twitching focus of activity— had now taken to stamping indignant hoofs in her efforts to dispel her tormentors.

"The flies are driving her frantic," I said. "Would you not be better to wait till the cool of the evening?"

"The midges will only be starting about proper, then," said Willie. "Hold her steady till I yoke her to the swingle."

He carried the traces back and harnessed them to either end of the swingle-tree, making sure that each chain was of equal length. Moving up to the pony's head, he gathered up the reins.

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"Get away back to the swingle," he said. "Start hauling on it and come with the mare as I ease her forward. Don't let go of the bar till the slack of the chain is taken up. That way there will be no jerk when she gets the pull of the log."

I picked up the swingle-tree, moved back till the traces were clear of the ground and lay back on the dangling chains.

"Right you be!" I called.

Willie chirped. "Get up, Sheba!" he coaxed. "Get up, pony!"

The traces tautened. I began to shuffle forward, lying back on the wooden bar like a surf-rider. It was easy to imagine that I, and not Willie, was in charge of this sleek, unpredictable force.

"Give a shout when the chain leaves the ground," Willie called back.

I watched the dwindling slack till the last loop uncoiled. When the chain straightened out and commenced to lift from the ground, I called: "Easy now! Take it easy, Willie!"

As the log began to take the strain, I released the bar and stood back. The pony jibbed at the extra pull of the lifting tree-stump.

"Quiet now, girl!" said Willie, patting her neck soothingly. "I think we'll leave you standing a wee minute."

We waited, Willie and I, while Sheba shifted about uneasily, the chain dipping and rising with each movement, but never quite reaching the ground. Willie, the reins held slackly, was staring at the swaying chain, his brows drawn down in a frown of concentration.

When he spoke, it was in a droning voice with as much meaning to it as the tiresome buzz of the flies still swarming around us.

"What would take you to the fair," he said, "is the way a decent modest girl could make such a disgrace of herself. To be found stretched out in your pelt on the floor of an old deserted hut and it littered with every class of slaughtering accoutrement from harpoon to punt-gun and an array of decoy ducks ringed round you like a squad of Peeping Toms and you in the company of a black-avised Judas the like of yon—" He shook his head slowly. "It's beyond the beyonds."

He brushed away a fly that had settled on his nose.

"Women are the rare oddities too," he continued. "In the midst of all the turmoil, hadn't she readied up her clothes and shoes. Laid out neatly they were—as if she were going to bed in her own room."

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He dug deeply into one ear with his finger.

"As if she was going to her bed," he repeated in a puzzled voice. "In her own room."

I fixed my gaze on the chimney ledge of my aunt's house and tried to concentrate, to the exclusion of all else, on a crow waddling back and forth as if on patrol duty. It was a seedy bird with balding head and plumage dusty, frayed and ill-fitting. Its ungainly body was mounted on feet as large and flat as any station sergeant's. At each end of its beat it halted and twisted its beak rapidly to either side, the victim of a life-time of suspicion.

When it had made certain the coast was clear, it hopped up on the centre chimney pot, its wings tucked tight to its sides, as though it had thumbs hooked in the breast pockets of a uniform. There it perched, gazing down the shaft, its head swivelling around so that each eye in turn could survey its depth.

The side-cocked head had a knowing look that told of a chimney worth investigating. Whose room, I wondered, did it lead down to? Perhaps to Cassie's bedroom. I remembered the shoes stowed away under the wash-stand. If there had been a fireplace in the room Cassie would certainly have her shoes neatly arranged along the bar of the fender. Just as her clothes would be folded away tidily, no matter what the circumstances.

The grotesque scene described by Willie unrolled itself before my eyes. The derelict hut, its hinged shutter ajar. A space in the centre of the floor cleared of litter and covered with sail cloth, round which squatted rows of wooden ducks, their painted plumage dull and faded, their round incurious eyes fixed on the neatly piled garments and on the two figures . . .

For the second time that day I was forced to squeeze my eyes tight shut on something I could not face.

It was at this moment we heard the footsteps coming up the road and the gay chatter, broken by bursts of laughter. We waited motionless, watching where the road curved inland and disappeared towards the village.

Round the corner they came; the tall rangy policeman stepping it out, uniform cap pushed back from his forehead, tunic slung over one shoulder, shirt sleeves rolled beyond the elbows; beside him Cassie, clinging with clasped hands to the crook of his arm, skipping and dancing like a schoolgirl. You had only to look at her as she snuggled against him, wriggling with happiness and staring up at him with admiring gaze to

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realise that Willie's story was true. It was easy to picture her, with swollen lips and eyes as black and glittering and sightless as they were that first night in the kitchen, yawning and stretching herself as she padded across the floor of the hut to the little heap of neatly-folded clothes.

Squirming with disgust, I considered the full extent of my humiliation. Night after night I had cringed after her, grateful for the casual caress you would give without thought to a fawning nuisance of a dog. I had swallowed rebuff and ridicule that only gawky ignorance could have stomached. My projected epic of a debauch so sumptuous, so gross, as to merit narration at school, had shrunk, under Cassie's scorn, to the capers of an unfluffed kid from prep-school.

Cassie was the first to speak when they stopped at the paddock gate. "Hello, boys!" she called across. "How's the work coming on?"

"Don't you see they are hard at it?" Constable Gibson said.

Willie ignored them. He beckoned me up, gave me the reins and went round methodically testing the straps on both collar and hames, checking on the traces where they hooked to hames and swingle-bar, tugging at the chain fastened to the tree-stump.

"We'll haul," he said, taking the reins back.

He chirped. "Get up, Sheba! Get up there!" he said.

The pony moved forward till she felt the pull of the timber. She jibbed again.

"Easy now, Cassie! Easy, girl!" he said.

Gibson laughed, a piercing cackle that put Sheba's ears pricking. "Did you hear that, Cassie?" he said. "You never told me he calls the four-footed friend after you."

"Behave yourself, Herbie!" she said.

Willie's face reddened. He rested Sheba for a few minutes before urging her on again. "Get up, girl! That's a good lass," he coaxed softly, chirping encouragement.

Still Sheba jibbed.

"Maybe a stick of dynamite would shift her," Gibson jeered.

Willie flinched. And no wonder. The river had been dynamited in the early spring and the police were said to be still trying to pin the crime on some of the habitual poachers.

Ignoring Cassie's timid appeals, Gibson kept up his teasing, apparently intent on riling Willie: "Crank her up, you boy you. Her battery's down. You've left her standing too long. Will we give her a push? Och sink her in a bog-hole and buy a tractor."

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Willie was getting flustered. His voice was louder—wheedling, urging, abusing. His hand was heavy on the reins, jerking roughly where once the merest twitch had sufficed. His movements—always slow, cautious, knowledgeable—had become fussy and agitated.

Sheba, infected with his uneasiness, was turning sour—sidling and backing to avoid the pull of the traces, jigging peevishly from side to side, tossing her head violently in her efforts to escape control. Nothing would persuade her to haul. In fact, Willie was put to the pin of his collar stopping her from backing into and fouling traces, chain and swingle-bar.

I was so immersed in the duel that the sudden shrill whistle gave me the same jolt as it did Willie and the mare. Sheba swung round, head up, ears cocked, gazing expectantly at the grinning malicious face of Gibson, who was slouched over the gate, fingers still dragging at his lower lip. Willie, pale with rage, jerked on the reins, striving to pull the mare's unwilling head round. Sheba resisted stubbornly.

I heard Cassie say: "Stop it Herbie! You'll only frighten the mare."

Gibson laughed. "Hey there, Useless!" he called. And whistled again.

Hesitantly, Sheba moved towards the beckoning sound. At once Willie wrenched back her head. Shortening his grip on the reins, he hauled her forward till chain and traces were at full stretch again.

The pony stood trembling. A lather of foam fringed her mouth. Sweat darkened her neck and flanks. Her ears were laid back. Her eyes rolled in their sockets with terror and shock.

Willie was breathing heavily. He shook the reins. "Get up there!" he shouted, his voice hoarse with fury.

Sheba did not move. Her ears were still flattened. Her eyes slanted back at the threatening figure with the unfamiliar voice.

Willie's free hand came up with the slack of the reins. He moved in closer to the mare. "You stubborn bitch!" he whispered, staring across Sheba's back at the paddock gate. "You silly, stubborn, betraying bitch!" He brought the rope reins down smartly on her flank. "Up—"

Sheba, plunging forward, seemed to pluck the word from his mouth at the same instant as she ripped the reins from his unwary hands.

What happened next had the remote ineluctable quality of

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a nightmare, where spectator and participant are one, and screams of warning are as soundless as the cotton wool that must be floundered through.

Helplessly I stood watching the pony gather speed. Willie ran a few crouching steps beside her, groping wildly for the whirling reins, regardless of the charging tree-stump behind him.

It was his undoing. The bouncing twisting timber caught up with him, dealing him a swinging blow on the legs that sent him staggering forward in a sprawled-out heap. The impact caused the pony to swerve: it did not check her panic-stricken flight.

There was a nightmare logic about Sheba's flight that absolved me from intervention. I should have shouted a warning to Willie. Perhaps I even did—a soundless nightmare scream, part of the cotton wool silence through which the bolting pony fled.

Gibson's hyena laugh unmuffled the sound of snorting breath, of thudding hoofs, of rattling trace-chains. "Oh-Oh-Oh! Sweet suffering Saviour, did you ever in all your born life see the beat of that?" He indicated, with wagging finger the sprawling form of Willie. "Behold the decline and fall of Buffalo Bill, the wonder horseman of the Pony Express! If you don't stir yourself, Nesbitt, your pony will be halfway back to the prairies of America," he said.

By this time, Sheba was stretched out in full gallop, mane and tail fanned out in splendour, a creature grown to twice her span by the speed of her going, flying hoofs and threshing timber-butt drumming the ground.

She was making straight for the paddock fence, a chest-high construction formed of three strands of rusty bull-wire, spliced and sundered and spliced again, attached to wooden paling posts so old and decrepit that some, freed by decay from their roots in the ground, now hung between heaven and earth like so many tethered souls condemned to the windy wastes of purgatory.

"She's going to tackle the fence!" Gibson shouted. "Go on, you girl you! Nesbitt never reared a jibber! Becher's Brook itself would hardly daunt you!"

There was a sound of cracking timber, snapping wire, flailing hoofs.

Gibson said: "Well, the curse of God on you for a thick, ignorant cowardly Clydesdale. Baulking at a couple of feet of fencing. Trying to barge through it like a bloody bullock! I

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tell you if I was near you, I'd rise you over it with a boot to your backside."

Mashed against the wire by the tree stump, the pony squealed with rage and fear, rearing itself up in its efforts to free itself from the wire.

"You've made a right pig's diddy of that job, Nesbitt. Look at the cut of that silly get wrapped up in a bull-wire like a Christmas parcel. The man that told you you could school horses should get his head examined."

Willie was squatted on the grass, arms clasping one leg, his face twisted in pain, pressed against the knees of his blood-soaked pants.

A tearing, splintering clatter. Once more the sound of thudding hoofs. The spliced wire of the fence had unravelled and the mare was through, scattering wide a skein of twisted fencing.

Off she galloped, dragging after her, besides the bouncing tree-stump, a length of severed fencing that had somehow got entangled in the tackle and now stretched out, writhing, jerking, flapping: a kite's tail of bull-wire and uprooted paling posts.

"Holy jumping...!" Gibson screeched out. "Give me a mouthful of air before I choke myself!" He was wheezing and coughing, one hand held over his mouth, the other smacking his thigh. "Do you know what it is, Nesbitt... You'd only want... a band of yodelling Indians... a bloody stage-coach... and that rusty old shotgun of yours... to make your fortune in the pictures..."

He drew in a deep whistling breath. Pointing a finger, he said: "Would you take one look at yon careering creature and admit like a man that she'll never stand between shafts?"

Willie was scrambling slowly to his feet, watching with dazed eyes the progress of the pony as it headed into the sand-hills, trailing after it the absurd string of leaping paling posts.

Fouled by some obstacle, the timber hulk shot high in the air, snapping free the chain that linked it to the swingle-tree and carrying with it the length of fencing. By the time the last paling post had joined the confused twitching heap, the pony was gone—rid at last of her alarming burden.

Gibson let a great shout out of him, squeezing his hands to his sides. "Oh, merciful God, have pity on my poor twisted guts."

He moaned gently. "Should I live to be as old as a cannibal pike, I'll never see the like again."

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Willie was stooped down, holding back the torn trouser cloth and the torn bloodied underpants, examining the lacerated flesh of his injured leg.

The mocking voice kept rasping on: "Did no-one ever tell you that you never raise your hand to a spoiled slut the like of yon? Don't you know what old Spokeshave, the poet, said about beating dumb brutes?"

He cleared his throat and intoned:

"If I had a donkey and it wouldn't go,
Would I belt hell out of it? No! No! No!"

Cassie wailed: "Herbie, didn't you promise me solemnly not to repeat—"

She broke off and faced around. "Are you badly hurt, Willie?" she said. "That was a sore toss you got."

Gibson said: "Saving your presence, girl, and not to put a tooth in it, he must be shook to the core."

He threw back his head and laughed, a long-drawn-out, seagull-screeching laugh.

A ball of anger rose in my throat. I looked at Willie straightening himself up painfully, at Cassie wretched with anxiety, at the torn fencing and the deserted sand-dunes. I looked at Gibson's swarthy face, alive with malice, grinning at his victims. Surely someone should give this vicious snapping brute a clout of the tiller to curb his flailing antics. Wildly I sought for words.

I said: "Clear off, you big cackling jackass! You'll have little enough to laugh about if you have poled Cassie as you poled that poor silly ghomey from the Crooked Bridge."

Willie spoke back over his shoulder, his cold indifferent gaze fixed on the two figures at the paddock gate. "Are you coming, Jim?" he said.

Without waiting for an answer he started off, limping with surprising speed, making for the gap in the fence.

Crippling along, one shoulder up to his ear, fisted hands held stiffly to his sides, blood-soaked long-johns hanging from the torn trouser-leg, he should have looked ridiculous. Instead, there was something tough and resolute in his bearing that made you forget he was balding, chinless, splay-footed: that lent inches to his puny stature and dignity to his limping gait: that sent me trotting proudly after him, deaf to Constable Gibson's bitter tirade of abuse and threats, heedless of Cassie's wailing curlew cries, unmindful even of the cool wind now fanning my cheek—a warning that the hot endless days of an endless summer were at last over.

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ARGOSYPROFILE

Arthur C. Clarke

Realist and scientist — but above all, a superb story-teller who believes in a man on the moon

by ARTHUR POTTERSMAN

HE is a prophet of the future, a seer of the space frontiers where explorers roam boundless galaxies, one of the modern creators of science fiction and, at times, even a deviser of the technology of tomorrow. Yet he never drives a car—preferring to read while he's being chauffeured. He looks no farther ahead in his own life than the novel he is working on *now*. And he is happiest when he is skin-diving.

This is Arthur C. Clarke, born a farmer's boy in Somerset forty-eight years ago, author of nearly two-score books—science fact and science fiction. And the man who invented communication satellites nearly twenty years before Telstar went up.

As an RAF lieutenant in 1945, he was working in radar and he published in the technical journal, *Wireless World,* an article explaining how three artificial satellites circling the earth could produce world-wide radio and TV links. Today, Arthur Clarke jokes about "How I lost a billion dollars in my spare time," adding, more seriously, that you can't patent a device too far ahead of its time, before it can actually be made.

Does he regret the lost billions? Apparently not: "My personal possessions are very simple—my library of books and a telescope. I spend my money meeting people, travelling

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around. I commute between Colombo (where his bungalow home is), New York and London. I'm very happy. I have problems I can cope with, but no worries, which is very important."

Clearly, Arthur Clarke has a sufficiency of wealth. Soon, he hints, the space-age Cinerama film he is now working on with Stanley (*Dr. Strangelove*) Kubrick, will make him a whole lot more.

Called *2001*, this is a story set just thirty-five years in the future. Neither Clarke nor Kubrick will talk about the plot, but I can glean that it focuses on developments in space technology, tells of an expedition across the solar system and suggests that any really advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Enormous effort is going into this film—including data, designs and advice from research scientists in America's biggest corporations, two rocket experts who have worked with US rocket-man Wernher von Braun, and a construction team from Vickers-Armstrong. The film has a multi-million-dollar budget, which leads the cynics to say that Messrs. Kubrick and Clarke are spending more on their rockets than Britain spends on her entire annual space programme.

Arthur C. Clarke has come a long, long way since his classmates at a Taunton grammar school, amused at his obsessions (he used to write in the school magazine), nicknamed him "Space Ship."

His father was a post-office engineer who turned to farming after the First World War. That life never appealed to young Arthur. "I liked visiting the farm," he explains. "I'm very fond of animals. But as for running a farm—no. In those days it was glorified labouring, and not very glorified."

At the age of nineteen he became an auditor in the Civil Service and came up to London, where he worked in the Ministry of Education, the Post Office and the Ministry of Food.

"The Civil Service was an occupation for gentlemen," he says. "I did a lot of writing there. I could do my job in two hours with a slide rule, and do what I liked the rest of the time.

"I was sharing a flat, and I met all the science fiction people at our apartment. 88 Grays Inn Road was the headquarters of the Science Fiction Association and the British Interplanetary Society."

Arthur Clarke can still pinpoint the moment in time at which his future absorption with science took root: "It came through my father. We were in a pony trap, crossing the road in the

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village . . . forty years ago . . . he gave me cigarette cards of prehistoric animals and they fascinated me. So my first interest was palæontology, and archæology, to some extent. Dinosaurs fascinated me. Then abruptly, I can't remember how or when, I switched to astronomy—and this was it.

"I read Lasser's *The Conquest of Space*, the first book in English on space travel. It overwhelmed me. Simultaneously, I read the first issues of the magazine, *Amazing*—I knew somebody who happened to have them. I was about twelve then, and I started to haunt Woolworth's to buy copies of *Astounding*, another magazine. I had every issue once, but they got dispersed in the war."

Soon after World War II broke out, budding spaceman Clarke quit his cushy Civil Service job and volunteered for the RAF—"About one jump ahead of the Army. I had the idea of working on navigation because of my knowledge of astronomy. When I applied, they told me about radar. That sounded interesting, so I went into that."

From 1941 to 1946 he travelled about England, equipped with typewriter and telescope, writing a few technical articles, and getting an invaluable training in electronics.

After the war, Arthur Clarke went to King's College, London: "I wanted to have a technical degree. I was interested in astronomy, but at college I had no idea what I wanted to do. I worked damn hard," he says with urgent pride, leaning forward in his chair, "and got a first class honours degree."

He also wrote his first novel, *Prelude to Space*, during a college vacation. "I already had a Government grant, so I ended up with a nice little nest egg."

Clarke was doing post-graduate work in astronomy and advanced mathematics when his first job came through—and, as it happened, the best a would-be science-fiction writer could dream of.

His college dean got him the assistant editorship of *Science Abstracts*, a journal published by the Institution of Electrical Engineers and *the* top scientific journal, in which all important papers on maths and physics are collated. For eighteen months Clarke handled this fascinating job. The science magazines of the world were his to read and a fleet of translators made everything accessible.

"I was still writing in my spare time," Arthur Clarke went on, "and when that curve shot across my salary curve I said,

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This is it. So I made a painless transition. I stepped from one elevator to another at the right point."

Technical images abound when Arthur Clarke talks. He gains recognition as a writer when he steps from one elevator to another. He decides to give up scientific journalism for full-time writing when one income curve shoots across another. Similarly, as we sat talking in his brother's genteel north-London house, where Clarke himself used to live before going to Ceylon, he twiddled with the dial of the telephone and, as an airplane droned in the sky, twisted his lanky frame to gaze, bespectacled, out through the window.

Science fiction seems almost an obsession, indeed. A bare mention of Rudyard Kipling calls from him: "Two of his short stories are pure science fiction—*As Easy as ABC* and *With the Night Mail*."

He is not a man who relaxes easily. "My hobbies always become full-time. First astronomy—now I have a proper telescope, the finest you can have. Skin-diving for fun ended up with living in Ceylon, running a team of divers and finding buried treasure." A few years ago, Arthur Clarke and his partner, Mike Wilson, found a three-hundred-and-sixty-year-old shipwrecked man-o'-war off the coast of Ceylon with at least a ton of silver aboard.

"I used to be quite good at table-tennis, the only game I've ever been interested in, which I learned in the war while fire-watching. I'm still quite good, even though I'm somewhat restricted"—he was completely paralysed for two months after an accident in 1962, and some slight after-effects persist.

"I've never even learned the rules of chess. I'm afraid of it. The game is infinite, too appealing. You could spend all your life on chess games, and never get anywhere. I can enjoy a game of draughts, though Scrabble is the only game I play now. But chess is a useless form of mathematics—I don't know if that comes from my pragmatism or my inherent puritanism."

Is he a puritan? "I was being facetious, but I do have a sort of impulse against wasting time. A lot of Westerners have this. It's this business of not being able to relax. One reason why I like Ceylon—and this is true of the East generally—is that you can discover how to relax if you see a lot of people relaxing. Eventually, it rubs off on you."

Arthur Clarke wastes little time when it comes to writing. On the day I interviewed him, he had risen at 7.30 a.m. to work on the Clarke-Kubrick novel he and the film director are doing together. It comes out before the space movie, to start

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the publicity drum beating. The first two versions didn't satisfy the authors, so Clarke threw away 120,000 words.

"I have very irregular work habits. I may not work for weeks and weeks—and then I'll slog night and day beating my brains out over the first draft of a novel.

"I've never had any serious setbacks, though there were times when a rejection slip seemed the end of the world. I now look back at that with equanimity.

"When I've completed this book, I don't even think about what I'll do next, except go home, and take things easy for a while, catch up with some of my skin-diving. I'll start writing some short stories again, but I never sweat at them. I just let the ideas lie around. I never write unless I have something to say, because I want to write it, because the time is ripe.

"I have no specific aims as a writer, except to make people realise the importance of space flight and to entertain.

"I don't have any final image of myself as a writer. I think when you can be defined you're dead. That's not original. Somebody said it better, I think Parkinson: 'Any organisation which is perfect is at the point of collapse.'"

These remarks of Arthur Clarke's were the first of a regular stream of quotes. Later, when I suggested that his optimism about people didn't really correlate with his views on man's stupidity, he threw some Walt Whitman poetry at me:

"I contradict myself.
I am large, I contain multitudes."

He may be infuriated with the stupidity of human beings, saying, for example, that what men cannot understand, they break. Yet he believes, like H. G. Wells before him, that men are capable of improvement, and one day will build sane and peaceful societies.

As to the nature of any future society, Clarke will not speculate: "I am a pragmatist. Another phrase I like is: progressive opportunist. I don't believe in *the* way of doing things. Any social system could be made to work efficiently and justly if it was run the right way. I can't get hot under the collar about these things. My Communist friends get very annoyed when I refuse to take them seriously. Ditto my capitalist friends."

All he will say is that there will be no wars x years from now—"It's not possible, any more than I can imagine people today feuding with swords and pistols in Whitehall. Society can't exist on that basis."

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And: "Society will change so much that nobody without the equivalent of an advanced engineering education will be able to survive. All non-intellectual jobs will be automated out of existence. And the thousands of drones sitting around doing nothing? There may have to be reservations for people with IQs less than one hundred. Exactly fifty per cent of the population is subnormal, *by definition,* just as fifty per cent is supranormal."

"Who'll do the putting," I asked—"you?"

"Ah," he burred back, "that depends on the reservations. I might prefer to be one of the put."

But these are questions that Arthur Clarke will not deal with in his stories. They are *moral* issues, and says Clarke: "My interests are technological."

And there is more evidence of this in his latest predictions, during a recent (spring 1966) visit to New York. Arthur Clarke forecast then: by 1970—space laboratories; 1980—landings on other planets; 2000—colonisation of other planets; 2030—human contact with extra-terrestrials; 2060—creation of artificial life; 2080—machine intelligence will overtake man's; 2090—immortality.

Doesn't he feel he's missing out here?

"I'm aware of it. There are thousands of areas of activity one *could* write about..."

Arthur Clarke declares himself a well-contented man. His novels appear in more than twenty languages—including Russian now. He has won his gold medals and other awards for popularising science. He speaks with understandable pride of the glowing references to him in a House of Lords debate last November on space—and keeps several copies of Hansard's report in his study.

Does he regret not having a family?—his marriage broke up after quite a short time. "I was married once—that was enough. I have more children than most people," he says, gesticulating at a bookcase crammed with editions of his work.

Is it, then, his work that he lives for now?

"My work never comes anywhere. I like meeting people. I have an awful lot of friends, an incredible number of people—in movies, business, the diplomatic set. I have all the acquaintances I can cope with, in three continents. As I move from one to another, I resume my old friendships just as if there's been no break."

Is there anything left that he still longs to do?

"I want to go to the moon."

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Lawn Tennis Quiz

1. Name the one-armed Austrian who reached the last sixteen of the Men's Singles at Wimbledon in 1947.
2. Which year was Britain's Christine Truman seeded No. 1 in the Wimbledon Ladies' Singles event?
3. "Pancho" Gonzales won a Wimbledon title the first time he entered, in 1949—which title?
4. The annual Wightman Cup contest between England and America consists of seven matches. How many of these are singles and how many are doubles?
5. Name the two post-war British Davis Cup stars who wrote: (a) *Tennis Rebel*, (b) *My Side of the Net*.
6. Maureen Connolly's nickname was "Little Mo"; which Wimbledon personality was nicknamed "Gorgeous Gussie"?
7. The first left-hander to win the Men's Singles at Wimbledon was Jaroslav Drobny in July, 1954. True or false?
8. In what year did Great Britain's Angela Mortimer succeed in winning the Singles Championships of: (a) Australia, (b) France, (c) Wimbledon?
9. The 1955 and 1965 winners of the British Hard Court Men's Singles Championship were both Swedish players. The 1955 winner was Sven Davidson—who was the 1965 winner?
10. Which Wimbledon title did America's Vic Seixas win on four consecutive occasions in the mid 1950s?
11. Who was the last Wimbledon Ladies' Singles Champion to win the Wimbledon Triple Crown?
12. Which of these Australian Davis Cup stars turned professional first: (a) Mal Anderson, (b) Lew Hoad, (c) Mervyn Rose, (d) Ken Rosewall?

What's the score? Turn to page 161 to find out.

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Another production of Shakespeare is on the boards—but the real drama is played out backstage, in this short story by WILLARD MARSH

O Happy Dagger

WHEN the curtain fell, the players quickly grouped themselves for what would be the customary pair of curtain calls, unless the local stagehand had slow reflexes. There was Ricardo Burbadge, doubling Poppa Capulet and the Apothecary; Roddy Swift, up from the dead as Mercutio *et al.*; Belva, Maye Ziegler, who had been a surprisingly competent Juliet, and of course himself, Christopher Wellington, handsome, ageless, hopelessly type-cast as Romeo.

Christopher smiled benevolently across the footlights as the curtains parted for the first call. As they closed, hesitated, then flew apart again, he inclined his head modestly at the continuing shower of sound, like the fat smack of water to a man parched, in his own case, for his entire fifty years. When the applause didn't die, the stage manager threw him an incredulous and somewhat rattled look. Brandishing his arm in fury, Christopher drove the spear-carriers off stage so that just the four beaming principals remained for the third call. With a scatter of sound still left, he signalled for a fourth call, took Belva Maye's hand and stepped forward with her, thinking in acute delight as the decibels rose, *By God, I knocked them dead in Mississippi.*

As a gallant fillip, he hoisted Belva Maye's hand and turned to her, bowing, permitting her to share his triumph with the wonderful, discriminating theatre-goers who filled the municipal auditorium nearly one-third to capacity. He was barely able to conceal his dismay when the applause increased distinctly. They were clapping for *her*, a total newcomer, a fill-in he'd picked from a little theatre just last week in Jackson.

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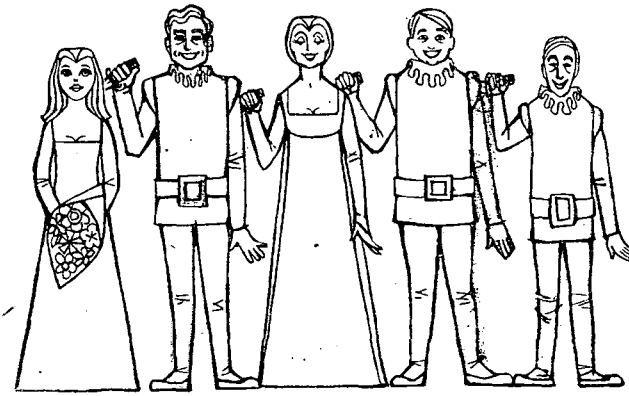

But he smiled until it hurt, loitering like a scavenger as gushy clubwomen tripped backstage to tell her how thrilling she'd been, "and of course you too, Mr. Wellington."

Before long, however, he was able to realise that, instead of being eclipsed by her, he had allowed her to dominate their scenes for the sake of her confidence. After all, she was his creation. Hadn't he urged her to learn The Troupadors' version of *Romeo and Juliet*—a rewrite that Christopher was particularly proud of—and hadn't he secretly rehearsed her in it, masking his disappointment at the dedication which prevented her from mingling theatrical love-making with the less public kind? And finally, hadn't he provoked the showdown with Celeste Randolph by announcing that Belva Maye was understudying her?

Poor Celeste, haunting the wings like an exorcised witch, hand quavering at a throat supposedly stricken with laryngitis. She had gambled that Belva Maye wouldn't be up in the part this soon. Thus, for her bluff, she was doomed to spear-carrying for the rest of her surely limited days.

Now she came on over to them, smiling as she bit the bullet like a little soldier.

"*Ma chère*, I was utterly enchanted. You were so vivacious, so *dégagée*."

The women embraced ardently, on the edge of tears from the intensity of their mutual affection.

Over Belva Maye's shoulder Celeste said, "And of course you were *très distingué*, as always, Christopher, apart from your chronic difficulty in projecting."

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Watching the older woman's sagging features beside those of Belva Maye, barely out of her teens, Christopher wondered how they ever could have been lovers. But that had been years ago, and it was only a dim memory, fortunately.

"Dearest Celeste," he said. "Now that the power of speech has been restored to you—a result, no doubt, of the age of medical miracles in which we live—we all look forward to the contribution of your maturity in such demanding and rewarding roles as Lady Capulet."

Celeste ran the octave on a laugh. "Dear boy, major rearrangements are in the hands of the man who holds the purse strings. Aren't you confusing yourself with Sam Porter, *mon vieux*?"

"God forbid," Christopher called out to her retreating back.

He turned to Belva Maye, his eyes continuing to banquet on the tender bosom gauzily concealed within the gown that had required taking in a good half foot. "And now, my dear, may I add my own encomiums to the lavish plaudits you received this evening? You were flawless," he said, more sonorous than sincere. Actually she'd been somewhat nervous and unsure, but she'd brought freshness and conviction to a Juliet long atrophied.

"Oh thank you, Mr. Wellington—" At his hurt look she said, "Christopher, I'm sorry, I keep forgetting. I only hope that Mr. Porter likes my work."

"Mr. Porter's status in our little troupe lends itself to exaggeration," he said irritably. "He's an advance man of dubious accomplishments, who doubles back on his trail occasionally to help himself to a disproportionate share of our box-office receipts, such as they are. You would feather your nest far more systematically by continuing to please *me*."

Belva Maye smiled innocently. "I just adore feathered nests."

"As a matter of fact," Christopher said, laying a light, comradely hand on her shoulder and examining her cleavage covertly, "you would please me greatly by allowing me to give you a little champagne supper." They were in a dry county, but poetic licence was permissible in an artist of his imagination.

"Oh, Mr. Welling—Christopher," Belva Maye clapped her hands in ecstasy, dislodging his grip on her shoulder, "I can't think of anything I'd adore more. Except that I just *have* to be sure of Juliet, so I think I'd better run straight back to

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my hotel room, bolt the door, cut off the phone and concentrate exclusively on getting my lines down. But I'm *ever* so grateful for the offer," she said, her eyes cast down in sorrow, "and you must be sure to let me take a raincheck on it."

Aware that he was grinding his teeth like a melodrama heavy but unable to do anything about it, Christopher watched her slim young flanks veer towards the ladies' dressing-room and swore that, despite his violent opposition to The Method, he would yet make her realise that a love affair acted with authority plays far better than a hollow sham . . .

Meanwhile, back at the hostelry, he thought wearily, the termite-ridden manse of a hotel they could afford, he would have to make a little night music with Ricardo Burbadge, seated in the rear booth of the coffee shop and nursing the corn on the rocks to which he was addicted. The old boy sucked at his glass like the giant toothless baby he was becoming, letting alcohol endorse the erosion for which senility had contracted. On several occasions tonight he had delivered lines from *Our American Cousin, She Stoops To Conquer*, and other time-proof, royalty-free harlequinades in their repertoire, and his scolding scene with Juliet had been a shambles.

As he slid into the seat opposite, Burbadge lifted a lazy hand in greeting. Probably wants to say Good Evening, Christopher thought, but has forgotten the words. "Splendid performance tonight, Dick," he said enthusiastically.

"Why, thank you, my boy. I thought I was in extra spry fettle myself," Burbadge replied in his corroded tenor. "And needless to say, your sword-play with Tybalt was an exhibition of dexterity far too worthy for the peasants to whom we posture."

"Thanks, Dick," Christopher said huskily, moved by the old boy's perception. He ordered a drink and sweetened it with an inch or two of gin from his flask. "But however adequate we both may have been, we can't continue carrying this particular vehicle on our shoulders alone, if you apprehend my import."

"I believe I do," said Burbadge grimly. "Wasn't Roddy atrocious?"

"Unspeakably. Have you ever seen a more embarrassing death scene? 'A plague o' both your houses!'" Christopher mimicked, in the tones of a spoilt child denied an opportunity to bite the mailman.

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"It's a fascinatingly moot point whether his Mercutio is less painful than his Paris."

"He can never pick up a cue. He caused us to have stage waits tonight you could drive a ten-ton trailer through."

"He walks like a dachshund."

"And that imbecilic bray of his. Do you suppose he sniffs laughing gas on the sly?"

"Here he is now," said Burbadge. He moved over to make room for Roddy Swift, the plump, ruddy-faced juvenile whose youthfully vacant smile had, somewhere along the years, become permanently fixed in place. "We were just discussing your rather staggering versatility, Rod. How do you manage to be so convincing in such contrasting parts?"

His ability to sound utterly sincere disturbed Christopher. How could he lie so effortlessly to one man and be so accurate with another?

But Roddy accepted the compliment with a modest laugh. "Oh, I'm an old Boleslawskyite, gentlemen."

Burbadge nodded reminiscently; "I knew the maestro well."

The waitress came over warily, having discovered that Roddy was the kind of customer who felt that pinches were as negotiable as tips.

"Put a large root-beer on my bill, will you, Goldilocks?" he told her, and when it came he said, "Lend me your flask a second, will you, Chris? I forgot to stock up back when it was wet."

Christopher complied ungraciously. Gulping half his glass in one draught, Roddy sighed, then began chuckling. He might have had something funny in mind, and then again he might have simply been rehearsing.

"Thinking about tonight's receipts?" Burbadge inquired.

Roddy shook his head. "Thinking about that cute little Belva Maye . . ."

Christopher frowned, remembering that Roddy was a manifest lecher.

"She's certainly fixed it so Celeste will never do another Juliet for us," said Roddy.

"She should have been replaced years ago," Christopher said eagerly. "She needs medical attention for even dreaming that she's right for the part."

"There's nothing so monumental as an old woman's vanity," Burbadge commented sadly.

"If she could act, it wouldn't be quite as embarrassing," Roddy said. "But she can't even anticipate a cue. You feed

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her a line and then stand around counting your buttons until she reacts to it. And the way she walks—like a penguin!"

"Here she comes now," said Burbadge.

The screen door of the coffee shop banged shut and down the aisle came Celeste Randolph, smiling in scorn. "*Bonne nuit, assassins!*" She took a stool at the counter opposite their booth, sitting backwards to face them. "You may continue the dissection of me, or have I already received a pious burial?"

"While it's true that you were a fleeting topic of our discussion," Christopher said blandly, "it is your feelings of inadequacy as a leading woman—thoroughly justified, I might add—that cause you to mistake calm analysis for calumny."

"*Au contraire*, I'm here precisely for some calm analysis of our situation, dear friends. My goose isn't the only one that's hanging high."

"Being enigmatic, of course, is half a woman's charm."

"Let me lay it on the line, then," Celeste said, *sans* French. "When Sam Porter returns, you're going to suggest that he replace me with that chittlin-fed baggage. Right?"

"I hardly think a suggestion on our part will be needed. The necessity will be self-evident once he glimpses said baggage in the role."

"Why do you think she'll be an improvement?"

The three men looked at one another.

"She's a little younger, dear," Burbadge said.

"She has a flair for acting," Roddy added.

"All right, she's a little closer to Juliet," Celeste said, "age fourteen in the original. The one by Shakespeare. We don't do that one, but sometimes we get people in the audience who've read the original and might be confused by what appears to be a father in hot pursuit of his daughter. Why, you pompous old fool!" she told Christopher, "it looked more like *Lolita* tonight than *Romeo and Juliet*. When Sam Porter sees you together, he'll not only replace me, he'll replace both of us."

Sputtering in indignation, Christopher turned to his colleagues for support in refuting the monstrous vilification. But they were wearing smilingly thoughtful expressions.

"She may have something there," Roddy said.

Burbadge nodded. "The discrepancy between you *was* rather apparent. I recall overhearing some tittering comment tonight to that effect..."

"Face it, your days as Romeo are numbered," Celeste said

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with a doom-like, oracular confidence. "You'll have to move up to father parts, where you belong. When I become Lady Capulet, guess who becomes my husband?" She turned to Burbadge, whose eyes were dawning in fright. "And *you* move right on out. To the old hams' home—provided you have your Equity dues paid up, which of course you haven't. Oh well, maybe you can get a job as janitor in it."

Roddy jumped in eagerly. "I guess that leaves me to man the breach. Don't worry, I can have Romeo down cold in time for Florida." He blanched at the look the others gave him.

"Listen to the other half-century-old fool," Celeste said icily.

"Why, I'm in my forties—"

"You antique ass, don't you realise that you're one of those flush-faced endomorphs preserved by alcohol who can only be a juvenile to someone *this* one's age?" She pointed at Christopher. "You're a perennial juvenile, not a lead. But you won't even be a juvenile any more, because who ever heard of a juvenile older than a leading man?"

It was true, and from their joint expressions even Roddy seemed to realise it. The three men turned to Celeste in appeal.

"What can we do?" Christopher whispered hoarsely.

Sam Porter was a balding, baby-faced man in his late forties who, one could tell at a glance, preferred eating to acting, at which he'd never been too good. He preferred being a producer to being an advance man, because it had a nice sound and entailed no work to speak of. He was given to smoking dead cigars for both the economy and the prolonged oral pleasure. Right now, Christopher knew, he was sitting cigarless in a centre-aisle seat, a man of two minds as he watched The Troupadors repeat—By Popular Demand—the Shakespearian classic with which they'd opened here. He'd read its review and heard that the new girl was a comer, but he'd received somewhat evasive opinions from the principals when he'd pulled in this afternoon. In a moment he would see for himself.

"'It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night,'" Christopher intoned vibrantly, "'like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear.'" He continued in this vein till Tybalt recognised him and was chastised by Ricardo Burbadge for an attempted breach of hospitality. Then Christopher stepped across the stage to

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Belva Maye, to construct the palm-kissing sonnet with her. But they never got through it.

As she began her lines, Burbadge recommenced chastising Tybalt. "'What, goodman, boy! go to, go to!'" He began whacking the flat of his sword against Tybalt's back as both Tybalt and Belva Maye gaped in horror.

Christopher delivered her next line, then one of his own, out of sequence. When she began stammering, he kissed her prematurely.

"Pick up your cues, dear," he whispered.

When they finally exited, a shaken Belva Maye was left alone on stage with the Nurse, played this evening, by some odd and special arrangement, by Celeste Randolph.

Belva Maye was guilty of conspicuously bad timing during their interchange, and when the curtain finally fell Celeste said, "Try to watch your diction, dear. You're getting awfully Southern."

"She'll snap out of it," Christopher said heartily, patting her hand. "But it *is* a shame that Mr. Shapiro had to pick tonight to be in the audience."

"Who's Mr. Shapiro?" Belva Maye said weakly.

"Orson P. Shapiro?" Celeste asked, astonished at her ignorance.

"He's that eccentric Hollywood producer I'm sure you've read about. Goes around handing out impulsive, long-term contracts."

"What's he doing in Mississippi?"

"He's shooting *Othello* on location somewhere near here. Using an all-coloured cast, I understand, except for Othello. He's got more money than sense."

"Curtain!" the stage manager called.

"Don't worry about a thing," Christopher told her. "You'll knock him dead in this act."

But he was as poor a prophet as he'd hoped to be. When she appeared on the balcony, he managed to omit the portions of his lines containing her cues, leaving her mute and naked as a beached fish while he waited reproachfully below. They stumbled through it somehow, in spurts and silences, and as the scene approached its climax Celeste, as offstage Nurse, began calling her in the midst of key speeches. With each reappearance, Belva Maye would be more rattled.

"What's happening to me?" she asked backstage, in tears. "I must be getting amnesia."

They shook their heads in silent commiseration.

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She had a crucial speech in Friar Lawrence's cell, and during it Christopher walked upstage so that she had to turn around to speak to him. As he'd suspected, her voice wasn't strong enough to carry.

"Things were going so badly," he explained afterwards, "that I wanted to leave you to the limelight. It was your chance to dominate the audience, but I'm afraid you lost them."

Old Burbadge shouted her witless in his scene with her—"To liven up a dull stretch," he explained to Sam Porter, who had come backstage to smoke a live cigar, indifferent, in his gloom, to the expensive, short-lived pleasure.

Her mock suicide scene was the riskiest one of all. It was a long soliloquy, with no chance for sabotage. She could hold the vial that the goodly friar had given her as she raved about the terrors of the tomb, and very probably win the audience back to her.

Celeste, however, got it off to a flying start by swiping the vial as she exited. Belva Maye was left there empty-handed at the bed saying, "'Come, vial!'" with a glassy look of horror, wondering how she was going to drink the potion when she finished delivering her lines. Finally, of course, she had to pantomime it, but it was done so desperately that the audience laughed and gave her a round of sardonic applause.

Her mind gave way completely in the tomb scene. Roddy Swift, doubling dead Paris and stealthy as only a corpse can be, contrived to make away with her dagger.

"'Yea, noise? then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!'" Belva Maye shouted, looking wildly around the stage for it. She was still weeping and babbling "'O happy daggah!'" when the Watch burst in.

At the single curtain call, Christopher stepped forward with the stricken girl and, as he had the first night, raised her hand and bowed towards her. It was a demand that the audience do the chivalrous thing, and they responded goodnaturedly, many of them possibly remembering their own amateur failures and willing to spare her further humiliation. The sound of applause, unmerited as it was, brought a flush of relief to Belva Maye's braced features, and when the curtain fell she hugged Christopher in gratitude. The cast quickly dispersed, anxious to avoid the funeral.

Sam Porter edged on over to them. Keeping his face averted, he handed her a small bill and some change.

"Sorry, kiddy," he said. "Here's the week's salary, after

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deducting your hotel bill. Hope you can make bus fare out of it."

"I have a little money of my own," she said. "Thank you for giving me the chance, Mr. Porter."

He ducked his head in acknowledgment and hurried off. Alone on stage with her, Christopher took her hand and said, "Oh, you do teach the torches to burn bright." He allowed her to re-embrace him. "You *were* good that first night, you know. I tried to bring you along too fast, that's all."

"Oh Christopher, it isn't your fault. You've been wonderful. I just over-estimated myself."

"I wish I could have covered up more for you," he sighed. "But you're a trouper, you'll bounce back. Get in another year of hard work in your little theatre at home, then write me. I'll send for you. I'll have bought Sam Porter out by then."

"Oh, will you, Christopher, *will* you?"

"You have my unimpeachable word," he said, wondering if he could afford a new shirt in Mobile.

"Do you suppose—" she faltered, "could we, well, use that raincheck on our champagne supper?" she said wistfully.

"Of course we can," said Christopher gallantly, leading her offstage. "And afterwards, if you like, I'll spare the time to share some techniques with you. I think I've discovered why the real you isn't coming over with sufficient conviction in your love scenes."

"You're so generous," she said, leaning her head against his shoulder.

And with unerring instinct, she had found his one and only vice.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (JUNE ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Prosperous*. 6, *Ibis*. 10, *Tallboy*. 11, *Operate*. 12, *Utah*. 13, *Penicillin*. 14, *Knees*. 16, *Privateer*. 17, *Submarine*. 19, *Trade*. 22, *White woman*. 24, *Chic*. 26, *Elevate*. 27, *Secrete*. 28, *Soya*. 29, *Assessment*.

Down. 1, *Pot-luck*. 2, *Oilcake*. 3, *Pubs*. 4, *Rhyme*. 5, *Uxoricide*. 7, *Braille*. 8, *Sterner*. 9, *Hesitant*. 15, *Space-bar*. 16, *Poisoners*. 17, *Sawyers*. 18, *Bribery*. 20, *Athlete*. 21, *Escheat*. 23, *Aisle*. 25, *Ices*.

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BY JAMES MEADE

CAWAKI

The engine fired and Sam lunged for'ard to slash through the taut grapnel line . . .

HE knew that he had missed the last bus, so he did not hurry when he left Anna's house. He walked in the middle of the road, past darkened houses, until he got back to the blue-lit streets of central Suva.

When he reached the taxi-rank near the Municipal Markets, he woke an Indian driver and they drove out along the coast road. The night breeze smelled of flowers and mangrove mud and the sea.

George paid the Indian and got out of the taxi. While the driver was reversing, the yellow headlights poked through the hibiscus hedge and flicked the grey, wrinkled trunks of the palms. George trod warily around the land-crab burrows and went up the front steps. He banged on the door and lit a cigarette.

He heard the rasp of hard bare feet on the wooden floor, and the click and scrape of the door-bolt.

"You there, Sammy?" his mother said.

"No, Mum—George. Go on back to bed."

"I thought might be it was Sammy. Must be he's still out fishing."

"All right, he's still out fishing. This is George and George is tired and George is going to bed."

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"Don't growl at your old mother because she can't see too good, son."

"*Isa lei*. All right, Mum, I'm sorry. You go to bed now, eh?"

"You think might be Sammy bring some *cawaki* when he come?"

"Cut it out, Mum. It's full tide, it's after midnight, and he's fishing out in Walu Passage. Even Sam isn't so tough that he's going diving for sea-eggs at night."

"Night-time, day-time, that's nothing to me. Your father always bring me *cawaki* when he used to go out to the reef. Now he's gone, no-one bring them any more. No-one think of anything for me any more."

The old part-European woman wagged her grey-frizzed head and sighed. George shrugged and jerked back the bamboo curtain that screened off his section of the front veranda. The sections of bamboo made a brisk clatter, and one of his brother's children mewled in the next room. George heard Sam's wife shushing the child as he lit the hurricane lamp beside his bed. He took off his slacks and draped them carefully over a wire hanger, then hung his new *bula*-shirt on a chair.

When he was in his *sulu* and singlet, he sat on the edge of his bed to finish his cigarette. His mother groped her way into the room and sat on the chair, crushing his shirt. George sighed and threw his butt out of the window.

"It's very late, Mum," he said. "Time you were in bed, true."

"I wait for Sammy. Might be he bring some *cawaki* for me."

"Ah, Mum, be sensible, eh? You know Sam. If the fish are biting, he mightn't even get back till dawn."

"I always wait for you boys. I always did. But what you care? You think I'm just one old useless around the place. At least Sammy brings me fish from the reef, good fish to eat, and not waste time chasing one girl thinks she's good *hula* dancer."

"Now, Mum, you know that's not fair. What about the *sulu* material and everything I get from work? Good luck for this house I work in the drapery. If I never get discounts, we never dress so well."

"What you think I care about that? Old woman, can't hardly see for cat'racts. What you think I care about clothes?"

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"All right, Mum, all right. Suppose you let me sleep now, eh? I got to go to work tomorrow."

The old woman grunted and stood up. She went back inside the house, and George listened until he heard her at the door of her own room. He pulled down the net and got into bed, thinking again of the tantalising, unconsummated evening with Anna. A bat chittered in the mango tree outside his window, and George punched his pillow and jerked the sheet up over his lean shoulders.

The housegirl was a full Fijian, a vague relative who had arrived one day with a new baby and had stayed on. She called George until he mumbled and pulled back the net. He reached for his watch and wound it, yawning, before he got out of bed. The housegirl grinned when he blinked at her.

"You nearly sleep too late, miss some fish for breakfast, George," she said.

"Yes, eh? I suppose that means Superman got back with his usual big catch."

"True, man. You ready to eat soon?"

"Sure, sure. Anyone in the bathroom?"

"No. Empty just now. Sam, he bundle up the fish, have his shower already."

"What if he did? The PWD doesn't work on Saturday morning, so he's in no hurry."

"But he got plenty fish to take into town, sell at the market today."

The girl grinned again and padded away, and George slung a towel around his neck. He picked up his shaving-gear and went through the house to the back veranda. Two sacks bulged damply in the corner near the bathroom door, beyond the reach of the sliding segments of early sunlight, and the smell of frying fish came out of the kitchen. George's brother sat at the head of the table on the veranda, loading his plate with steaming lumps of *taro*.

"*Bula*, bro," Sam said. "The white-collar worker running late this morning. What's the matter, you waste too much time fooling around with your girlfriend last night, eh?"

"Very funny. Just like on the radio."

Sam grinned and pulled a fish apart; he crammed some of it into his mouth and spoke around his chewing. "Don't get hot, Georgie-boy," he said. "I know that Anna keep you on the run, keep you too busy for you to come out and help fishing."

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"You're too full of yourself and your fishing, you know that?" George said. "You like to fish in your spare time, that's all it is. Because what you take in and sell, the money won't get back here. You bring home enough fish for us to eat, and then what? The rest goes for booze, so don't tell me what a Superman you are."

"You think you can do better? All right, you try some time."

"I can fish. Anyone can fish."

"Yes, eh? But you won't dive, even if that's the only way to get the catch. Eh, Georgie-boy?"

"I haven't got time to argue. Only, next time you go to the reef, how about you bring back some *cawaki* for Mum, eh?"

Sam wiped juice from his chin and scowled at his mother, who was now sitting on the bench against the wall, her nostrils widening as they were caressed by the smells from the kitchen. One of Sam's children wailed inside, and his wife hurried out of the kitchen with a baby's bottle in her thin brown hand.

"I always bring plenty fish," Sam said. "Enough feed us all."

"Yes, but Mum wants *cawaki*," George said. "That's right, eh, Mum?"

"*Sa*, waste time," Sam said. "First thing when I get back she ask me if I bring any."

"*Cawaki* very good, Sammy," the old woman quavered.

"See?" George said. "I told you. She's got her mind set on it now. You know the way she gets."

He went quickly into the bathroom and started shaving. He heard Sam angrily demanding his tea, and he began whistling.

He was under the shower when Sam came and thumped on the door.

"Hey, Georgie-boy," Sam shouted. "Why don't you do the old lady a favour, eh? Why don't you go out to the reef?"

"Can't hear you," George called back.

"You hear me all right, bro. Why don't you do some diving, instead of selling shirts and running around after that girl all the time? If you can show you're a proper man, might be Anna give in to you instead of just dangling the bait."

A chill that was not from the shower made George's skin tighten. He turned off the tap, and was drying himself when Sam thumped on the door again.

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"You hear me, Georgie-boy? How about you come out with me to Walu Passage, do some diving, eh?"

"You don't have to dive far to get *cawaki*."

"Yes, eh? You telling me? But remember, the most of them come when the tide come too. When the water start coming up and up on the reef, they come bowling in like billiard balls. But other things start coming in too—bigger than *cawaki*. So I think you *lamu*, you scared to go out to Walu Passage."

George tightened the waist-fold of his *sulu* and opened the door.

Sam grinned and went back to the table.

"All right, Superman," George said. "Just because I don't see the sense of risking my neck diving like you do, don't think that makes you so special."

"You go out to the reef, son?" the old woman said to George. "Get *cawaki*?"

"There you are," Sam said. "The old lady's counting on you, now."

"As if you hadn't said anything," George said. "As if you hadn't put it in her head."

Sam made his square brown face look thoughtful, and wagged a thick finger at his younger brother.

"You know, Georgie-boy, those sea-eggs supposed to be good for other things," he said. "Just think how much Anna love you then."

"I ought to hit you for that," George said.

Sam looked at George's bony body and lean arms. He shook his head and spooned more sugar into his cup. "You know the one going to get hurt if you try," he said. "Just take it easy, bro."

"Superman," George said. "All right, I'll come out with you, I'll dive for damn *cawaki*. When do we go?"

"Take it easy, bro," Sam said again.

"No, come on," George said. "I'm ready whenever you are. Suppose we go this afternoon, after I knock off from work?"

"Wake up," Sam said. "Be full tide then. Tomorrow morning is all right."

"Tomorrow then," George said. "Anyway, you'll be on the rum by mid-day today."

"That's right, bro," Sam grinned.

"We make it tomorrow for sure," George said.

"Forget it, George. You don't have to go to the reef.

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I'm the one for that. I always have been. You're the one for inside jobs."

"That's what you always think, eh? We'll just see."

Sam shrugged his heavy shoulders and began to pick his teeth. The housegirl took his cup away and brought George's breakfast to the table.

"All right, bro," Sam said. "Tomorrow we go, you and me both. Now I got to get the early bus, take my fish in."

When George and the rest of the family got back from early mass, Sam was sitting on the back steps, his eyes hangover-red and his big jaw blue with stubble. He frowned and winced when the housegirl began bustling around in the kitchen.

"You still want to go out?" he growled.

"I'm going to get changed now," George said.

"Well, don't waste time, eh? Soon as we eat, we get going."

After breakfast, they went down to the beach behind the house. Sam carried the outboard over the puddled coral to where the long slim dinghy was moored. He waded into the channel that came out between stiff brown mangrove roots, and clamped the engine into position. George put the drum of fuel and the canvas fishing-bag on board, then went back for Sam's spear-gun and the thick-hafted, ten-foot pronged spear.

While Sam fiddled with the engine, George untied the line from its mangrove branch and knotted it on to the light grapnel. He used the long spear to pole the dinghy away from the mangroves into the first clearly-defined bend of the channel. Sam started the outboard and guided the dinghy out past the tired shallows and the grey sandbanks, to the blue water of Suva Harbour.

The sting of the sun was softened by occasional clouds and there was a light wind that tasted tart and clean. Sam was whistling before they reached the outskirts of the main reef, but George sat silently. His shoulders were hunched and he kept his back to the approaching noise of the low-tide waves that fumbled at the edge of the reef.

Sam took the short-cut to Walu Passage, zigzagging as he followed the chain of green craters, tilting the outboard when the dinghy passed over the shallow stretches and the crusted squatty rocks.

"Get the grapnel ready," Sam said. "We anchor on the edge, near that gap."

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"I see it. Go slow a bit, eh?"

"Getting nervous, Georgie-boy?"

"Don't you worry about me, bro."

Sam laughed and cut the engine. The grapnel dug into the pale tinted coral, and the dinghy stretched the line taut. At that place, the coral plateau was cut by a triangular channel that spread and deepened until it faded into the dusky blue of Walu Passage. There was only four feet of green-glass water over parts of the reef, but there were deep saucers along the edge of the channel and long spaces between the partly exposed, potato-shaped boulders. Near a huge starfish that had a skin like blue suède was a loose school of small fish. Something frightened the fish: they formed a bright cloud and fled over the reef.

George swallowed, aware of a strange sensation in his palms and the soles of his feet.

"Let's get started," Sam said. "Tide on the turn, be coming in fast pretty soon."

"All right, all right. But I'm after *cawaki*, nothing else. So don't expect me to come if you're going spearing in the channel."

"You *lamu*, Georgie-boy? All right, you play around get your *cawaki*. Myself, I do some proper diving."

Sam stripped to trunks and spat into his plastic goggles. When he was in the water, he hauled the double rubbers into the notches on the arrow of his gun. He dived, frog-legging into and along the channel. He surfaced half a chain away, and dived again without turning his head.

George looked back at the smudged greens of the shore before he emptied the lines and hooks from the canvas bag. He put on goggles and went over the side with the bag in his left hand, bracing himself against the insistent, rising tide. The first time he dived, the sea took and whirled him over the coral, and he came up gasping. He floundered back to the dinghy, the wet bag slapping at his arm. He hung on to the gunwale and shuddered.

The water pushed at his bare legs. He put his head under, looked from left to right, then at the flooded plateau beyond the grapnel. Sam came back from the blue water and gained a footing on the reef. He had a salmon cod quivering on his arrow. He waded powerfully towards the dinghy, eased the pink-speckled fish off the barb, and threw it into the bilge. When he turned to George, his teeth were very white in his wet face.

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"What's the matter, bro?" he said. "I see plenty *cawaki* around here, but you never even got one yet. You never get anything just hanging on to the dinghy."

"I'm just taking my time. Leave me alone."

"Sure, bro, sure. But you waste time like this, no wonder you never get anywhere with Anna."

Sam laughed and slid away with the tide, reloading as he went.

George dived, pedalling against the current until he found the first bed of *cawaki*. The sea-urchins rolled gently over the coral, their short white spikes moving in relays on their coloured shells.

He gathered them quickly but, even when he had filled and emptied the bag twice, there seemed to be very few *cawaki* in the dinghy. The salmon cod gasped as a purple-shelled *cawaki* inched over its eye.

The water was now shoulder-high, and the mild poison of the sea-urchins' spikes had raised small red lumps on the insides of George's arms. He hung on to the dinghy and panted until he saw Sam's dark head appear, then he moved cautiously in the same direction.

He was having to go farther for *cawaki* now, so he took the long spear with him and used it as a brace against the tide. He thrust the prongs into the coral and held to the haft, half-squatting on the bottom while he snatched at the tumbling, lemon-sized sea-urchins.

He came up for air twenty yards from the dinghy, the bag half full, and he heard Sam shout. His brother was a chain farther away from the dinghy, on the very edge of the blue water.

"Hiyee, shark come. Look out, bro . . . keep looking."

George dropped the bag and started for the dinghy, both swimming and poling himself. Sam shouted again. George stopped and turned, the fear rising up through his thighs and belly and squeezing a whimper out of his throat. He could see Sam working his way back to the dinghy with no time for more shouting; only the desperate bite of air before he submerged to face the shark. George whimpered again and looked to where the dinghy bobbed on the sun-cheerful water; but, not daring to splash, he let the sea carry him towards his brother.

When he was close enough to follow the pattern of Sam's retreat, he dived to a rock on to which he could anchor himself. He peered down into the sudden slope of the channel

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before he looked towards Sam again. His brother saw him and waved him away, but George went up for air only and returned to the rock. Sam was closer now; George followed the movement of the spear-gun, and then he suddenly saw the shark.

It rose up from the channel so smoothly that it seemed to be lazing, but it slid twenty feet through the water almost as quickly as George's head could turn. It was eight feet long, shiny-brown and terrible in its grace, and its eyes were a chill yellow.

Sam flung out his arms and yelled under water. The shark veered away, planing down into the lower strata of the channel. Sam followed his own air bubbles to the surface. He gasped words as George's face came up.

"Good luck . . . you come . . . my brother. Now one up . . . one down. Don't spear . . . unless . . . too close. Keep away . . . from edge. I . . . under first."

They dived alternately, and they had reached the place where George had dropped the bag before the shark re-appeared. It flashed up out of the dusky blue and made its first real pass at Sam. George looked under the water, and his belly writhed as he saw the way the shark moved and saw its shadow flickering and humping on the rough coral under its sleek torpedo body. But it shied away again from the threat of Sam's gun, and their lungs burned as they fought the tide.

George was bunching his leg-muscles for the effort that would put him into the dinghy when the shark charged. This time it came threshing up over the rim of the channel, straight for Sam, and he pulled the trigger. The arrow glanced off the shark's back, but the impact and the *thunk-isssh* of the released rubbers altered the angle of the charge towards George. He screamed sound and bubbles and thrust with the spear at the slit mouth curved widely open. He felt the thick shaft snap, jarring his hands to the elbows, then the hurtling brown body slammed into him and flipped him through the water.

He hauled himself frantically to the surface. Sam's fingers dug in under his arms and pulled him into the dinghy. He lay with *cawaki* spikes puncturing his back while Sam jerked the starting cord. The engine fired and Sam lunged for'ard to slash through the grapnel line. The dinghy fled over the coral, away from Walu Passage and the hammering whiteness of the breakers.

George dragged himself up on to the thwart and looked

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down at the sudden pain in his thigh. The shark's hide had rasped away an area of skin six inches square, and blood mingled with water to drip on to the *cawaki*. George watched the way the white spikes turned briefly pink, a curious numbness drifting through his body. He shook his head and blinked, then turned to Sam.

"Hurt you bad, bro?" Sam said.

"I don't know. No, never mind it. I never feel it till I sit up."

"Here, wrap my shirt around it," Sam said. "Good luck you come for me, my brother, because that devil wild. I shoot the guts out of one parrot fish, and that's what bring him. But you fix him, all right."

"Yes, eh?"

"*Sa*, you don't know it? Man, you give one yell and shove that spear right down his neck. Then he bang into you when he run to die, because he know the others come for him. Then I drag you on board."

George nodded slowly and finished wrapping Sam's shirt around his thigh. He sat up straight, breathing deeply. A *cawaki* spike itched in his back, and he reached around and pulled it out. The waves slapped the bow as they started across the last of the blue water.

"You really got something to tell that Anna of yours, now," Sam said. "Go out for *cawaki* and kill one shark."

"I did, didn't I? And don't think I'm not going to see her today, either. This time I'm really going to see her."

"You will," Sam said. "True. Hey, what say we try some of these *cawaki*?"

"Sure. Enough for the old lady, eh?"

"Plenty. Here, I'll do it."

Sam cradled the steering-arm in the crook of his elbow and used the fish-knife to crack the shells of two big *cawaki*. He scooped out the meat and tossed the shells over the side, then passed one fat yellow lump to George. George chewed happily, the rich salty juice squirted on to his tongue. He swallowed and flipped over another of the sea-urchins with his big toe, wincing a little in pain as the movement hurt his thigh.

"Suppose we have another one, eh?" he said. "Because, this time when I see Anna, I'll need the power."

Sam nodded. The brothers grinned at one another, and George turned to watch the approaching shore.

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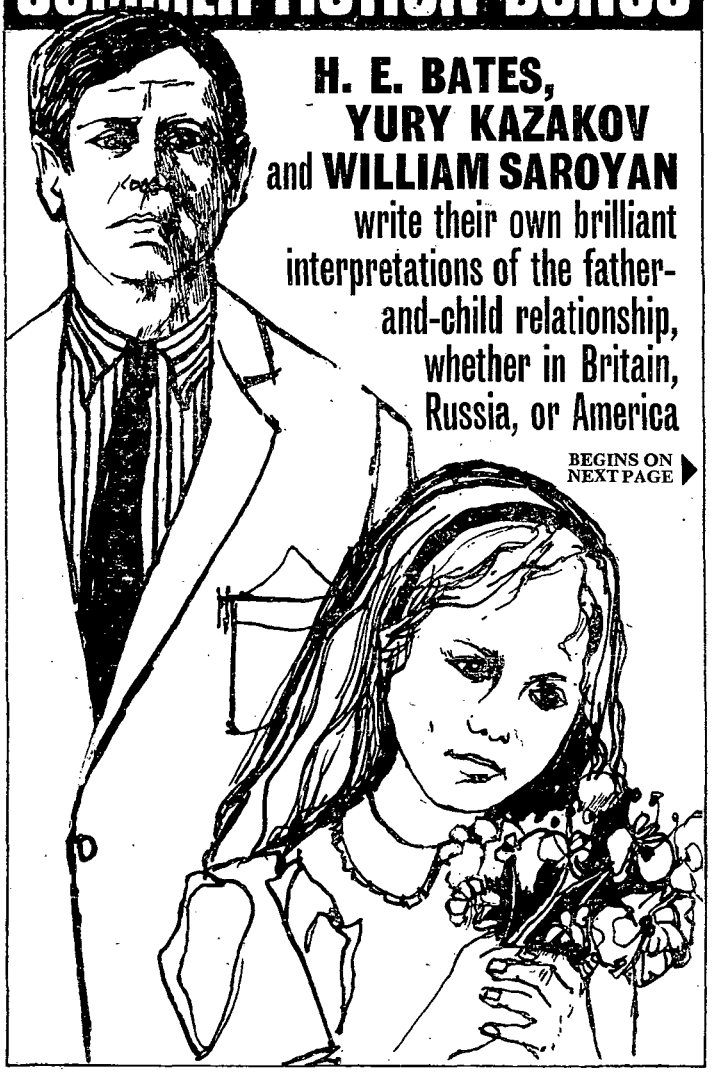
SUMMER FICTION BONUS



H. E. BATES, YURY KAZAKOV and WILLIAM SAROYAN write their own brilliant interpretations of the father-and-child relationship, whether in Britain, Russia, or America

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H. E. BATES

SOME OTHER SPRING

IT was going to be rather something, he told himself, for the tenth time or so, to see the children again after nearly two years. They might well have changed out of all recognition; they might well be strangers.

It was partly for that reason he had left his car in the village and decided to walk the rest of the way, a quarter of a mile or so, across the fields. He would go in—no, sort of saunter in, quite casually, as if in fact the house were still his own—through the garden, by the back way. It seemed altogether too formal to use the front door. You couldn't very well knock and say, "Hello, good afternoon, excuse me, I've come to pay my visit to the children. I'm allowed to see them once a month, if you remember. You know, the court order. Yes, I know I haven't—yes, it's been some time—I hope you got my letter? I did write to confirm."

The old Saunders' place next door looked well, he thought, across the fields. The black and white front stood out in the August sun like a piece of iced cake against the black background of pines. He always envied the Saunders' place—so marvellously well-kept, so permanent, so immemorial somehow, so secure: all due, of course, to Elspeth, who looked after her father as efficiently as she looked after the garden, the house, the accounts, the cooking and everything else. She would have made someone an awfully good wife, Elspeth, he

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always thought: nice looks, charming, pleasant, affectionate, good taste, good clothes, good manners, good cook, good everything. He simply couldn't think why she had never made it. He supposed she might well have given up the thought of it now. But then, in a way, perhaps it was no loss: you had to have women like Elspeth, who ran their fathers' houses with efficiency, made miracles of gardens, pleased everybody, remembered birthdays, became miraculous godmothers and were always faultless friends. After all, they couldn't all be wives.

The surrounding countryside looked pretty immemorial too, he thought. It was so long since he had seen it that he had forgotten how perfectly the low fold of meadows gave way to strips of cornland, the barley almost as white as the chalk on which it grew, and the glowing beauty of the dark beechwoods above and beyond.

If these old familiar things seemed to surprise him pleasantly, the sight of his own house—it wasn't his own any more, but for some reason he couldn't get out of the habit of thinking it was—grated on him, it always had, with irritation. You could see even from a distance that it fairly sprouted shabbiness. Even the curtains of the window in the east gable hadn't been pulled back: that old, old bone of contention. Why on earth couldn't Carrie remember?

Naturally, of course, because she was Carrie. She was made like that. He could look at it dispassionately now. Untidiness, shabbiness, slopping about, come-easy, go-easy, dust and cobwebs: she loved it all; to her it was all, in a sense, romantic. A house in the country was merely a glorious ramshackle plaything for messing about with, whereas he himself had just as naturally wanted it to be ordered, civilised, a pattern.

For instance, the garden. He had been most passionately keen on the garden. He had gone to great expense in making, among other things, a rock-garden, with specially imported stone, and a lily pond. In no time the lily pond was full of rusty toys, old bricks, icecream cartons, ghastly little tricycles. The children dug sand-castles among the rocks. They played absolute hell with his beautifully nurtured gentians.

Carrie thought this natural, even funny. They must be allowed, she fiercely maintained, to be themselves, to give expression to this and that, to run free.

"But God, the wretched pool looks like a bomb-site. Look at the mess—look at the tin-cans—"

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"Then let it look like a bomb-site. To them—"

"But damn it, hell, it isn't a bomb-site. It's a pool. A lily pool. I paid good hard-earned money to have the thing made and now look what the little horrors—"

"And how are they to know that? They don't know. They can't differentiate between a lily pool and a bomb-site. To them it's merely a place. They can't differentiate—"

"Oh, don't keep using words like differentiate!"

"And why not?"

"Oh, it's sort of councilese—sort of—well, why don't you just say 'tell the difference'?—I don't know, it's sort of suburban—"

"Sort of, sort of, sort of— My God, it's no more suburban than that!"

But now he had reached the back boundary of the garden. He paused by the privet hedge. He seemed to see them still, the little perishers. He saw Nigel, the boy, actually riding a filthy tricycle through the lily pond, crushing lilies as they floated in full bloom, with Gilian, the girl, towed on behind in what seemed to be some sort of wretched fish-box on wheels. They were laughing uproariously, almost idiotically, and Carrie was laughing with them. No wonder he had hated and loved them; no wonder the end had come.

"You've got a sort of bead-frame mind, you have. Everything's got to be neat and in rows. Proper colours and added up. All nice and tidy and mathematical," Carrie had said.

He was almost, at that moment, on the verge of turning back. It seemed the height of stupidity, suddenly, to rake it all up again. Could children change? He doubted it. Once there, the character could only manifest itself accordingly; like a plant, it was fixed: poisonous or not, fragrant or otherwise.

All of a sudden he was bothered by something about the hedge. It was somehow different. That end of the garden had always been a rampant wilderness deep in nettles, a maze of bryony and elderberry everywhere. It was where the tin-cans came from.

Now he was aware not merely of an air of change, but even of order. To his infinite astonishment the hedge had been smoothly clipped. The elderberry bushes that he remembered as being like untidy purple autumnal umbrellas had been laid low. The wicket gate, halfway along it, had actually been painted, the slats alternately green and white.

With his hand on the latch of the gate he was halted by

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an oppressive thought. Had Carrie married again and not told him? Or had she now a boyfriend for whom the new-painted garden was as essential a part of her attraction as the lipstick on her face? He suddenly felt, in any case, a dreadful stranger, an intruder, cold and out of it.

He supposed, now, that that was why she had invited him to tea: family gathering and so on. It would ease the situation: everyone on best behaviour. This, at least, was a relief. In such a situation he wouldn't have to play games, make pet mice out of handkerchiefs or pretend, as he jogged the children on his knee, that he was a raspberry-jam factory.

He pushed open the gate and went into a garden that surprised him, like the hedge, with its air of orderliness. Gone were not only the elderberry bushes, but the tin-cans. Shrubs, with an underplanting of silver foliage in many shapes, had supplanted them. The old brick wall that ran behind and beyond had been cleaned up and planted with a yellow Mermaid rose, still in full bloom, and a clematis that erupted over the crest of it in thick purple pennants, warm velvet in the August sun.

"And good God, an *Abutilon megapotamicum*! Incredible. What on earth's that doing here?" He stood staring at a shrub hung with many red and black and yellow bells, in shape not unlike a fuchsia, and felt a sharp strange pang of envy. Some new influence had been at work all right. How otherwise had she ever managed to plant that? It wasn't even hardy.

He started to finger the shrub's slender leaves, jealous now not only of the shrub but of Carrie. In a way it wasn't quite fair. He had always wanted to grow that particular *Abutilon* but had never really dared to risk it. The three-coloured bells were so beautiful. They were like little pagodas. He fingered the leaves again. One might, he supposed, have a shot with cuttings?

"Are you trying to pinch bits from the garden?"

"Oh no, I really wasn't doing that. Oh no, I was just admiring."

He turned and saw his daughter, Gilian, standing on the edge of the path. He supposed she was seven now, or thereabouts. He couldn't accurately remember. She seemed awfully tall anyway, he thought, and was wearing tartan trews, a red shirt-blouse and her blonde hair in a horse-tail.

"No, you really mustn't think I was stealing. Just admiring, that's all."

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"That's what all the people said at the garden party. Oh no, nobody was putting bits in their handkerchiefs! Just admiring, that's all. Did you want Mummy?"

"I'm your father."

For a moment he fully expected her to say something like "I might have known," but then, as the cold notion of being a stranger suddenly enveloped him again, he heard the familiar voice of Carrie, rather high-pitched as usual, saying as she came across the lawn: "Ah, there you are! No wonder we couldn't see you—creeping in by the back way, eh?"

He refrained from commenting, although strongly and briefly tempted, on the word creeping, and merely said: "Afraid I was caught in the act. Hello."

"Well, after all, there is a front-door bell."

He stood facing Carrie, not knowing what to say. He hadn't seen her, either, for nearly two years. She was very brown and rather leaner in the face, he thought. Her very light blonde hair was done in that chewed-off fashion that seemed to be so popular at the moment. He didn't like it. His daughter stood apart.

He felt he ought to refer, somehow, to the incident of the *Abutilon*. He said he supposed that Gilian hadn't recognised him.

"Oh, nonsense! Of course she knew you. She's been hopping about expecting you all day."

"Yes? I must say the *Abutilon* took me by surprise."

"The what?"

"The *Abutilon*. The thing growing up the wall. I must say you've done wonders with the wall."

"Oh, that. That's not me, I'm afraid. That's Charles. He's responsible for all that."

Well, damn it, he thought. He felt she might have told him. He supposed, really, that he hadn't any real right to know of—well, any new set-up, liaison or whatever it was—but he was after all the father of the children.

Who was this Charles? Another gardener, it seemed. That struck him as pretty rich. He and Carrie had practically arrived at dagger-point because of what she called his bead-frame mind, his meticulous passion for the straight line, proper colours and everything added up, and now here was this Charles and the garden as neat and ordered as a park.

He noticed that the children weren't dashing about it everywhere on those damned tricycles, either. He looked hastily at Gilian, who in return gave him, shyly, a sidelong glance and

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a smile. She too, like the garden, was incredibly tidy, so utterly different from the sloppy, muddy little horror who had trailed about his lily pool that again he felt a stranger, cold, out of it all.

Then he remembered that, of course, he was a stranger. He didn't belong here. He heard Carrie ask if he wouldn't like to see the rest of the garden before tea and as they began to walk across the lawn, itself as smooth and even as a sheet of green baize, his eye caught in the middle distance a great orange crowd of tiger-lilies, curled turbanned heads flaming against some artemisia like a cloud of grey.

He was at once stricken by a pang of jealousy. At the same time he had to admire the rightness of the combination, of the contrast between gold flower and grey leaf, fire and smoke. It was all most effective—if anything, too damned effective.

"Oh, that's Charles again. Anything you see out of the ordinary, that's Charles."

He now supposed that Charles would, of course, be at tea. Conversation would have to be made with Charles; he would have to be polite. In irritation he wished he had never come. It was all a bit deceitful, not quite fair, not playing the game.

"I think you're awfully like your photograph."

He discovered that Gilian was walking very close to him. Her airy light horse-tail was almost transparent in the sun. He was aware of a presence very feminine and slightly strange too, not at all daughterly. Her sharp blue eyes, though shy, never left him.

"I take awful photographs. Which photograph was that?"

"The one where you're gathering wild strawberries. Up on the hills."

"Oh, yes."

"You've got your handkerchief knotted over your head because it was so hot. Don't you remember?"

Children had awful memories, he thought. They remembered the most ridiculous, impossible details.

"You remember that," Carrie said. "Even I remember that day."

"We gathered five pounds and afterwards we made jam and it didn't set very well." Gilian kept him in a sharp, prolonged side-long glance, now partly in recollection, part in scrutiny. "You can't go up there now. They've ploughed it all up."

"Oh yes, I remember now." He didn't remember at all—or just, perhaps, very vaguely.

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Glad to change the subject, he noted a new blaze of fire across the garden: a burning vermilion cluster of horns with small white honeycombs of dahlias below. Again, the contrast was very striking, very right. He supposed it was a salvia of some sort?

"Oh, you must ask Charles. He knows all about names. I'm hopeless. You know, I think you and old Charles might have a great deal in common."

Old Charles, he noted with irritation and then saw that she was smiling at him. He noticed the particular quality of the smile with surprise. Formerly it too, might have been an irritant. It was an old habit of hers to smile when acid, even bitter. Now there was no trace of acrimony.

"You must come and see my garden. I've got a piece all to myself."

"Oh, yes, you must see Gilian's garden. She's mad about her garden."

"When, now?"

"When she's ready. You're very honoured. Even I don't get asked."

"After tea, will you come?"

"Yes, of course."

Speaking of tea, Carrie said, she thought they might go into the house now. Where was Nigel? Would Gilian run and find him? He found himself recoiling coldly at the name Nigel. He had always hated that name. It had been a great source of conflict, that name, a great breeder of rows, but in the end he had given in.

"He'll come, won't he?" Gilian stood very close to him again, still holding him with that sharp, shy, side-long glance. "He never comes if you go and fetch him."

"Here's Elspeth, anyway. Oh there you are, Elspeth—nice and early, good."

Charles, he noted now to himself, didn't have all the monopoly of taste and the rightness of doing things. As Elspeth came across the lawn in a light cream linen suit piped at the edges with what seemed to be thinnest stalks of bright green reed she also seemed to have the quality of some well-placed flower. Her deep natural brown hair was burning and sombre in the sun.

"Now we all know about your dreadful memory, but don't go and say you don't remember Elspeth."

"Of course I remember Elspeth. Vividly. Is that the right thing to say, Elspeth?"

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"Of course. Only there was a time when you used to kiss me too."

Elspeth held up her face to be kissed. He duly kissed it, on both cheeks, with polite affection. At the same time he remembered that he had kissed neither Carrie nor his daughter. It was perhaps remiss. On the other hand there was Charles.

"That's more like it." The eyes of Elspeth were like moist, gold-brown shells. "How are you? Let's have a look at you." She stood back to appraise him. Her smile, like the cheeks he'd just kissed so lightly, was smooth and warm. "Pass with honours."

"Putting on a little weight, I thought," Carrie said.

"Carrie, nonsense! Not a gramme."

"Have you put on weight? You have."

"Why is everyone so obsessed with weight?" he said. "If you must know, I've lost three ounces since yesterday. I've had my hair cut."

Elspeth laughed brightly at this, with rich amusement. Carrie seemed, however, not to think it funny and looked at him with what, in the past, he had sometimes called that old-spoon look of hers. It was tarnished and unreflective.

"Well and what do you think of the garden? Don't you think we've livened it up?"

"We?"

"Oh, it's Charles and Elspeth who've done it all. You know how mad keen Elspeth always was. Charles and she talk the language. Just like you do."

The voice of Carrie was again an irritant. They were all walking across the lawn now, Gilian still close to him, still watching. The old white French rose, *Madame Alfred Carrière,* was still flowering beautifully, for the second time, on the house wall and for some reason he again thought of the *Abutilon.*

"Yes, that was from a cutting of mine," Elspeth said.

"Everything's from Elspeth's cuttings. Elspeth brings them and Charles bungs them in."

He had no idea, for a few moments, what to say, and walked on in silence. Then something made him remember Gilian. Her eyes were still fixed on him and he said: "What about your garden? Does Charles help in your garden too?"

"Oh no! My garden's my own."

They would have tea, Carrie said, on the lawn, under the big cherry tree. She would put the kettle on; everything was ready on a tray.

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It was close beyond the cherry tree where the lily pond had been. He looked for it now in vain. A bed of heathers, with dwarf conifers and clumps of blue-grey grass and a pocket or two of miniature scarlet roses had taken its place.

"I'm afraid the pool's gone for a Burton. That was an early casualty. The aquatic things grew like mad and smothered the water-lilies and then the cherry leaves came down and in the end there just wasn't any water. It was an awful mess. Charles couldn't have that. He filled it in."

Silently he mourned the pool. It had been rather a pet of his, the pool. Perhaps it was badly sited there, too near the tree, but all the same—

"Will you be long, Carrie?" Elspeth's voice interrupted. "Can I help? If not, I'd rather like to show Roger that thing I snaffled from the old abbey garden. The red thing. The one nobody's been able to name."

"As long as you don't drag it out too long. India or China?"

"China, I think. I know Roger likes China. He always did."

The eyes of Gilian watched him like those of a dog waiting to be tempted with a morsel of food, for the snap of a leash, for a run across the fields.

"I do want you to see this thing. Nobody has a notion what it is. I suppose we could send it to Kew and they'd know. How does the garden strike you?"

"It seems larger somehow."

"That's Charles. He's done a lot of clever cutting down, Charles. Opening up vistas and that sort of thing."

He suddenly felt the compulsive pull of two forces: a growing impatience with Charles and a submission to the deep brown warmth of Elspeth's voice urging him to look now at a long serpentine valley of azaleas where once, he knew, nothing had grown but gooseberries. Of course the azaleas were over now, but in the spring—it had been marvellous in the spring.

"Did I hear a rumour that you were going to be married again?"

He knew it was a try-on; he knew there was no such rumour. He merely said: "No, no. And you? What about you?"

"Oh, I still keep house for Father."

"Still? It isn't good for you."

"I suppose not."

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She caught his arm, guiding him away from the azaleas. The new plan of the garden was all unfamiliar to him. It wasn't his any longer and he felt more than ever a stranger to it all, a cold intruder.

"Well, there it is. What do you make of it? I just snaffled a couple of cuttings and in no time Charles had it going."

He was coming to the point where, he thought, he could cheerfully have strangled Charles. The shrub he now saw before him, four or five feet high, flowering with a curious blood-red tassel, slightly flamboyant, was very beautiful. It was totally unfamiliar too, but he said: "It's that Obedient Plant thing, isn't it? You push the flowers round and they stay where you put them."

"I never thought of that."

"Try pushing the flowers round. Swivel them. They ought to stay where you put them. Like the hands of a clock."

He watched her fingers on the blood-red flowers. He saw her touch and twist and turn them this way and that, and then saw that they were not like the hands of a clock. They didn't obey; they didn't stay where you put them.

"So it isn't that, after all."

"No, it can't be that. To me it always looks like a sub-tropical snapdragon. But it's not. No other thoughts?"

No, he said, he was afraid he had no other thoughts. It was something of a mystery. Of course she could, he suggested, always go back to the garden she had pinched it from and ask there.

She laughed, throwing her head back, and the sound was as warm and tawny as the tiger-lilies he had seen, not long since, burning across the garden.

"Supposing I took a flower and looked it up and dropped you a line?"

No, she said, she thought that would rather spoil it now. It would be better to let it stay as it was, something of a mystery. It would probably turn out to be some awfully ordinary thing—a rampant weed from Kenya or somewhere. One day you'd meet someone who would laugh in your face and say, "What, that thing? We could never get rid of it."

Her alternate laughing and talking suddenly stopped. The garden, shut off at some distance from the house, became very quiet. A profound silence sang all about them. The warm brown eyes encompassed him and she said: "Shouldn't ask this, I suppose. But why the long time coming back? It's difficult, I suppose."

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"I wasn't exactly encouraged."

"Well, you're encouraged now."

She put her face to his, giving him no more than the shadow of a kiss on the side of it.

"Well, now tea I suppose."

"Well, yes, I suppose—"

She started to walk away. For a moment or two he felt left in air. Then he felt a powerful urge to take her by the shoulders and turn her back. After all, he was free. There was nothing, not a thing, to hold him now.

"Well, come on. You heard what Carrie said. Don't drag it out too long."

He joined her without a word and together they went up through the new azalea walk, crimson here and there with a burning leaf or two, and so to the lawn and across to the house.

He became aware, halfway across the lawn, of a waiting figure.

"Gilian's on the watch for you."

"So I see."

From the house Carrie appeared, carrying a silver teapot and a plate of cream-cheese sandwiches. She smiled and said there they were and how perfectly they had timed it and her voice was dry. "Milk or lemon, Roger?"

"Oh, lemon," Elspeth said. "He always did."

"I'll have lemon today too," Gilian said.

Set half in sun, half in shade, the table with its shining cups and china gave a twisted sort of sparkle.

"Well, did you solve the great mystery?"

No, he said, he was afraid he'd made a wrong guess.

"Obedient Plant, he thought," Elspeth said. "But it turned out not. It didn't obey."

Well, Carrie said, if it beat Charles it would beat anybody.

"What is an Obedient Plant?" Gilian said.

He started to explain about the Obedient Plant. A certain feeling of futility about the explanation suddenly made him impatient and he was on the point of stopping the whole thing when he saw the eyes of his daughter, large and transfixed, holding him as if mesmerised. Hastily he renewed the explanation, saying how the flowers could be turned this way and that, wherever you liked, and would stop where you left them.

"How clever. How did you find out about a thing like that?"

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He supposed he'd swotted it up at some time, heard of it somehow.

"I think it's marvellous."

"I can't imagine," Carrie said, "where Nigel's got to. Gilian, go and look for him again."

"I looked. He said he wouldn't come. He's playing with water outside the dog-kennel."

"He's been truculent, that boy, all day. Apologies for your son—he's sometimes a bit like that."

Without a word he picked up his spoon and jabbed at the lemon in his China tea. Apologies: as if the truculence, the refusal to come to table, were all his fault. He was relieved, however, rather than offended. One of the things he had dreaded more than anything was to meet the boy. It imposed on him an obligation only equalled by the necessity, sooner or later, of meeting Charles.

"By the way," Elspeth said, "I brought a few seedlings of the other *Abutilon* over. The mauve one, *vitifolium*. I put them in the greenhouse. You know it, Roger, don't you?"

"It's lovely."

"I really prefer it to the *megapotamicum*."

"I think I do, too."

"We had it once before, but the last bad winter killed it. Now the new one has set seed."

"We had it here too, and something killed it. Some truculent axe, I think," he said.

At once the tea-table seemed to flame. An interval of what seemed the better part of a minute, but in reality only a few seconds, ignited and seared the air. He waited for yet a further whip of it to reach him from Carrie's tongue but she merely poured more hot water into the teapot and Elspeth said: "I think they need over-wintering inside. They're that bit tender."

"I'll tell Charles."

The flame that had momentarily and dramatically flashed across the table by now was dead, leaving empty ashen air behind.

"I thought I heard the gate," Carrie suddenly said. "Go and see. Perhaps it's the postman."

"It could be Charles," Elspeth said.

"Oh, no. He won't be here today."

Well that, he thought, was at least considerate. Thank God for that. At least the ordeal of meeting the universal Charles needn't bother him any more.

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Gilian, he noticed, hadn't gone to the gate. He helped himself to a third cream-cheese sandwich. She took one too. As she did so he noticed, surprisingly for the first time, that she was wearing two circular badges on the lapel of her blouse: one scarlet and one gold.

"What are your badges for?"

"One's for good conduct and one's for the week's progress."

"But you're on holiday."

"Yes, but I'm just wearing them today."

He ought, he supposed, to talk about schools and progress and things like that. On the other hand— He went to drink more tea and found that his cup was empty.

"Let me fill you up. Was it right? Enough sugar?"

"Delicious. Just one lump."

Yes, schools. That was important. "Do you like school?"

"You've touched on a sore subject," Carrie said. "No, she doesn't."

"No, that's not true. I do and I don't."

"Well, we were all like that. I remember—"

He stopped. He saw that not only was Gilian looking at him, eyes minutely watchful, but that Elspeth was watching too.

"Well, go on. I thought we were going to hear something terribly important—"

"No, no. Just that I— You know how school is."

There was a kind of light Madeira sponge cake, with jam filling, on the table. Would he care for some? No, he didn't think he would, really, he wasn't for sweet things all that much. Nor, it seemed, was Gilian.

"Strange, that," Elspeth said. "I notice all children are like that, nowadays. They're not much for sweet things. They all go for savouries. I've got a niece of three who gorges stuffed olives. I think I was twenty before I tried a stuffed olive and then I didn't like it."

"I hate stuffed olives," said Gilian. "I hate savouries and fishy things and all that. I hate—"

"Now, now," Carrie said. "Don't let's have a hate day."

"Hate day?" he said.

"Yes, we have hate days," Carrie said. "One day this week it was horses. The day after that, circuses, wasn't it? Yesterday it was Charles, of all people."

"Well, I do hate Charles."

"Now nobody on earth," Elspeth said, "could hate Charles. Charles is an absolute—"

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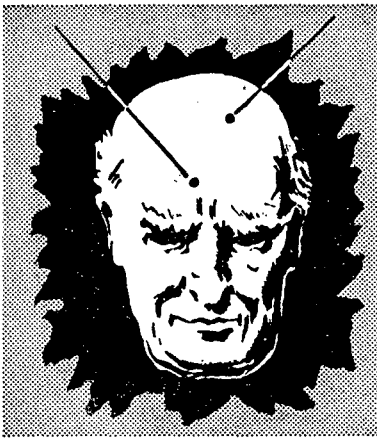

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"I hate him. He never lets me do anything. He's always mean and snappy and you don't have to touch things."

God, he thought, this was— He sipped slowly at his tea. A leaf from the cherry tree, prematurely crimson, floated suddenly down in the windless air and settled lightly in the centre of the tea-table, making Elspeth say: "Oh, leaves falling already! Don't say it's going to be an early autumn."

"I think that's the one thing that makes Charles really bad-tempered," Carrie said. "Leaves. Sweeping up. He hates them. They're so endless."

"Well, this year we've gone in for one of those patent sweeper-up gadgets. You must borrow it."

"Ah, that means you'll monopolise him. I think you've got even more leaves than we have."

"Well, we'll have to toss up for him again, that's all."

In mystification he sat mute. It struck him as being more than a bit liberal, two women tossing up for the husband of one of them, and again he felt out of it all, a cold intruder in a strange world. Was that the reason, perhaps, for the hatred? It was understandable. He was near enough to hating Charles himself.

"How much do these things cost?" Carrie said. "I might as well get one, too. He hates borrowing things."

"No, don't go to that expense. After all we share him. Let's share the gadget."

"All right, if you say so. By the way, since the days are drawing in, won't it soon be time we changed the timetable? —you have him in the mornings and me in the afternoons."

The mystification on his face evidently turned to astonishment, then stupefaction. He felt positively sullen. The intrusion on peculiar private affairs made him wish to God, once again, that he had never come. A certain warmth he had hitherto felt for Elspeth curled up and died inside himself like a dry worm. It wasn't any wonder there was hatred.

"Roger, you look terribly thoughtful."

Thoughtful? He started to say something about not being a particularly cynical man but of course if sharing Charles gave any satisfaction—then his sentence died too, cut dead by Elspeth and Carrie laughing.

"Roger, you're a scream—did you really think Carrie and I—?"

"In the *mornings*, too! God, I'm never any good in the mornings, anyway."

"Oh, me, of course, I'm terrific! Can you see me?—all

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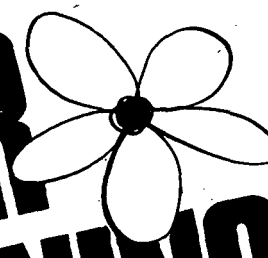

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voluptuous in slacks and a wind-cheater, waiting for Charles in a wheel-barrow!"

It was not, he thought, funny. He stared at his empty tea-cup, at the garden and then, quickly and sullenly, at Gilian. She in return hardly looked at him. There was no change in her face even when Carrie and Elspeth burst out laughing again so loudly and high-spiritedly that it mocked him. He felt like the victim of some bad, practical joke.

"Roger, what an idea—you didn't really think—"

"Well, perhaps we should try it some time," Elspeth said. She was still laughing, bright tawny eyes quite flashing in their amusement. "I never thought of it—hello, where's Gilian hopped off to?"

The joke of Charles died out slowly, in repeated splutters, a damp but irrepressible firework.

For him, too, the afternoon died. No, he wouldn't have more tea, thank you.

"I'm sorry you saw dear old Charles in such a bad light," Carrie said. Her voice now had that slight edge to it, fine with acidity. "I hope our poor old gardener is now acquitted without a stain on his character."

"It was a genuine mistake."

The aftermath of laughter was cold. He tried to think of an excuse for going very soon, without seeming to be too impossibly stiff and was suddenly struck by the thought of the boy playing outside the dog-kennel.

"I suppose I ought to say hello to Nigel before I go."

"You're not going yet? Go and find him yourself—he'd like that. There's plenty of time."

He got up from the table and walked across the lawn. Behind him he caught the echo of yet one more cackle of laughter, but when it died the afternoon was gripped in quietness.

The dog-kennel in the yard behind the kitchen was empty, graced by neither boy nor dog. He looked at it for a few moments, feeling empty too. He remembered the yard as a dumping ground for buckets, heaps of sand, bits of iron bedsteads lashed together in grotesque shapes of planes and cars, old bath-tins labouring in sordid puddles or beached across the waste of unswept asphalt.

Now it was all carefully swept; there were even tubs of scarlet and pink geraniums set about it; the asphalt had been replaced by broad flags of paving stone.

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He walked through the yard and out to the kitchen garden beyond. That too, was neat and orderly, a barrack square filled with platoons of carrot and onion, beetroot and beans, enough potatoes to feed an army.

He went out of it by a wooden wicket gate at the far side. Beyond it, in a triangle of holly and briar and laurel, the garden ended, and it was almost a relief to see it end half in neglect, hidden away, in secret disorder.

In the centre of it sat Gilian.

"This is my garden. Charles won't let me have it anywhere else."

"It's nice here. All on its own."

"Do you like it?"

An oblong plot of earth had been scraped out and lined with flints, half-bricks and lumps of stone. He stared at it for some time, not speaking.

"I've got candytuft in there, but it hasn't come up yet. And Iceland poppies. They're really for next year."

"Are they carrots coming up there?"

"Carrots? No, that's supposed to be larkspur."

"It looks like carrots."

"Oh no, I don't think so. I hope not. I sowed Chinese

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pinks, too. That's what it said on the packet. Chinese. Do you think it's them coming up?"

"No, I think that's grass there."

She had only just made the garden, she said: only a week or two ago. It really hadn't got started yet. Everything seemed to be so slow coming up. Should they be quite so slow?

"It doesn't get an awful lot of light in here."

"No, I know. But it will later. In the winter. When the leaves fall."

"Yes. And in the spring. Plants respond to light as much as anything. You'll see an awful lot of difference in the spring."

He stooped and pulled up a root of groundsel and threw it aside.

"Oh, must you pull that up? I thought it was a flower."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't think you wanted it."

He would send her packets of seeds, he said, as if in compensation, and she said thank you, she would like that. She rearranged a few stones along the edge of the plot and picked up a piece of broken glass or two and threw them away.

"You thought I was stealing bits from the garden," he said. "Rather funny."

It disturbed him that she didn't say anything in answer. Perhaps it wasn't funny.

He felt it time to go. Would she come too? He ought to go and say goodbye to her mother.

"No, I'll stay here. I've got quite a bit to do."

"Well, I'll say goodbye then."

He thought at first, foolishly, that he would shake hands with her. He actually extended his right hand and then dropped it to his side. Then she slightly lifted her face and he kissed it on both cheeks and it was almost, for a moment, as if he were saying goodbye to Elspeth instead.

"I must go now. Goodbye."

"Goodbye. You won't forget the seeds?"

"No, I won't forget the seeds. What seeds would you like?"

"I don't know. Not really. Anything."

"Well, you say and I'll send them."

"No, you choose. Anything you like. You choose."

"All right. I'll try to send some good things. Goodbye now."

"Goodbye."

For some reason it was the thought of Elspeth, not Gilian,

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that rode light and uppermost in his mind as he crossed the kitchen garden, then the yard, and came out to the lawn and flowerbeds beyond. He had been profoundly glad of Elspeth, without really realising it, all afternoon. Elspeth had helped enormously. Of course the misunderstanding about Charles was all perfectly ridiculous, genuine mistake though it was, all his fault. The idea of two women sharing—it was all preposterous but now he could, perhaps, seeing that it was all over, share the joke.

By the time he reached the lawn there was no-one in sight. The tea-table was cleared. The lawn was empty. Then he saw the figure of Carrie, waiting on the steps of the house.

"I'm sorry. It was Gilian. I had to see the garden."

"You're very honoured. Did you see Nigel?"

"No, he wasn't there."

"I see."

"Has Elspeth gone? Oh, surely not! I wanted to say goodbye."

"She suddenly fled. She suddenly remembered she had some cream to pick up in the village. It was nearly half-past five."

He once again felt out of it all, cold, a stranger intruding.

"What did she have to rush for?"

"She's like that sometimes."

"I didn't say goodbye."

"She said to tell you goodbye. And if you ever had a thought about the name of that plant—"

"Oh, yes. Did you say honoured? Why?"

"Even I haven't seen the garden yet."

He stared across the empty lawn towards the tawny flame of tiger-lilies with their attendant silver sprays, at the purple burning clematis on the wall. It was all splendidly kept, in beautiful order. There was hardly a leaf, a twig, a blade of grass out of place.

"What was the garden like?" Carrie said.

He paused before answering. He must go pretty soon. There was nothing to wait for.

"She has great plans for it," he said. He remembered suddenly her watching eyes, her long, waiting silences. "It should be marvellous in the—"

"In what?"

"Oh, in the spring."

Or if not in the spring, he thought, some other time: some other spring.

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YURY KAZAKOV

OUT SHOOTING

THEY spent the night in the loft of an abandoned log cabin, sleeping on dead leaves which had lost their smell. Peter woke up as the first weak daylight came in through the holes in the dry thatch. His son, Alexey, was still snoring, his head muffled in his vest, his arms and his long legs and great big feet sprawling. The butt of his gun stuck out from under him.

Peter pulled on his boots and very cautiously, afraid of slipping, climbed down the outside ladder in which many rungs were missing. Straightening up at the bottom, he stood for a while, looking at the whitening east, the still trees, the shrubs heavy with dew, then walked slowly round the log cabin. The place had once been an enclosure for cattle, the cabin was used at night by the herdsmen, and there was a smell of smoke, milk and manure... But it was five years since it had been abandoned, the walls of the enclosure were down and nettles grew boisterously round the cabin, their leaves large and pale. Everything about this once-inhabited place had a deserted, lonely, long-neglected air.

The cabin door hung on its hinges and Peter went in. The windows had no panes, except for one dim fragment, grey with age and rain and sun. Leaves were piled in the corners; the door and the metal plates of the stove had been taken off

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and it gaped, a cold, black empty hole. Why had the people left? Where did the herds pasture now?

Sitting down on a pile of leaves in a corner, he slowly lit a cigarette, his dark, discouraged eyes watching the smoke as it drifted to the window and tangled in the thick, dusty cobwebs. The cabin smelled of rotting timbers and of the dry clay of the stove, while from the windows came the fresh and melancholy smell of the new grass and the clean air. His

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cigarette went out. Peter brooded over the days when he had come here shooting as a very young man.

He had been twenty then. Wild as a colt and almost ill with happiness, he had wandered in these ringing spaces for a whole month, alone or with his father, sleeping in a tent or a haystack, sleeping the dead sleep of the young and waking up at dawn, his life before him—untouched, endless and full of joy. He had wandered round the lakes and through the fields and woods, rejoicing in his youth, his strength, ready to swim for a wounded teal, to walk dozens of miles to shoot an elusive snipe. At this time, too—this perhaps was the most important —he had been in love, thinking ceaselessly and with sweet anguish about the girl he loved, yet also, because he was young, thinking that life had even greater things to offer him, that this was not as yet real happiness, that an ineffably greater happiness lay ahead.

How many things had there been, lived through and forgotten since then! Yet this region, filled with light and quiet, and the days he had spent wandering about it, were fixed in his memory as the best, the purest in his life. And he remembered all of it, all the days and all the places where the shooting had been good, the hidden springs, the trees which had served as landmarks, and even what he had thought about.

Now he was back, but this time with his son, and all the way he had felt tense with joy at the thought of seeing it all again, but now he was downcast—so much had altered, aged, dimmed ... Nothing was as it should be, only the dawn and the dew on the grass and the smells were there, for ever the same. And it was strange to think of the thousands of people, many yet unborn, who would at some time awaken in this place and look at the sunrise and the mist on the fields, and smell the strong, sad smells of the earth.

Soon his son woke up and began banging about in the loft. The ladder creaked and there was a thud of feet.

"Father!" Alexey called softly.

Peter sighed, ran his hand over his face and came out.

Alexey, his long legs in their ski trousers spread wide apart, was looking up at something, his face scared and thrilled.

"Shh!" he grabbed his father's arm. "Hear that?"

"No. What?" Peter strained his ears.

"Don't you hear them?" Alexey whispered excitedly, glancing at his father, his eyes round with delight. "Wasps! There are three nests of them up there, I missed them last night in the dark ... Now I bumped into one accidentally, and

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the row they set up! Hear it now?" he looked up again with the same expression of terror and joy.

"Yes, they certainly are noisy," Peter agreed, smiling.

But he couldn't hear a thing. Hearing is going now, he thought sadly and, not to get too depressed, hurried his son. "Come on, come on," he muttered, "it's late. Rucksacks, guns, where are they?"

"Coming!" Alexey climbed the ladder without a sound. Equally silently and with a serious face, he handed his father first one rucksack, then the other, and the two guns and the heavy cartridge-bags. He pulled on his boots, came down and only now drew a deep breath.

"Let's go!" Peter said in a loud, brisk voice and strode on ahead through the wall of the enclosure to where he knew there must be a path.

They couldn't find it for a long time and got soaked, making their way by guesswork towards the tall dark pine woods. Their feet sank deep in the wet grass, the fields were white with daisies. What a lot of good hay wasted! Why don't they cut it? What a place! Peter thought angrily. Alexey followed him, yawning loudly and stumbling over molehills; a tin was rattling in his rucksack and the faint, rhythmic sound reminded Peter of something, but he couldn't for the life of him think what it was.

They found the path as soon as they entered the pine wood. The wood was dark and seemed deserted. Only from the dry river-bed beyond it did an uncertain pale-blue light filter through the serried trunks; and there too, after a pause, a bird chirruped from the meadow-sweet, a very simple, two-tone song: *Pii-pii, pii-pii.* Alexey yawned and stumbled again. "Still far to go?" he asked sleepily.

Just as if it had been waiting for this question, a woodcock burst out of the darkest part of the woods and flew between the tree trunks with a quick, tight flutter of wings. Startled, they both stopped, and Peter's heart turned over: so you could still find woodcocks here.

"Goodness, how he startled me!" laughed Peter. "Come on, we'll shoot later, there's plenty of time."

But Alexey turned off the path without listening and stole silently over the moss, the pine needles and the cranberries, gun in hand. Peter watched him tensely, any moment expecting a shot, then raised his gun and quietly moved on.

He came out into the clearing and sat down on a fallen tree to wait. In front of him there was a small field covered in

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mist, then more woods, then there ought to be another field, then a small fir thicket, then a water meadow with mounds and clumps of sedge—and finally, the lake where he used to shoot.

Soon Alexey appeared and went up to his father, putting his gun strap back on his shoulder and brushing something off his face. "Come across anything?" asked Peter.

"No, nothing," Alexey answered, as though pleased. "But how wild it is! And all those mushrooms, the berries—What a lovely place! Are we really going to live a whole month here? It's wonderful!"

"You'll see, we'll live like kings," Peter looked at his son affectionately. "You like it? I was afraid you wouldn't... Good boy."

They walked on along the overgrown path, across the meadow to another wood, but this time Alexey went ahead while Peter followed, watching his back and thinking what a fine big son he had and how glad he was to have him with him.

The sun was high up and the dew clung only to the shadows of the bushes when they reached the lake. They had not been in any hurry and, enjoying the silence and seclusion, had rested in the clearings on the way, watching the sun quietly rising, listening to the glassy creaking of the cranes, the knocking of a woodpecker, the piercing cry of the merlin...

Coming to the lake, Peter took off his cap, stroked his thinning hair and looked hungrily around him. How everything had changed!

The lake looked smaller and had somehow aged. The narrow, shallow end of it was completely clogged with weeds and sedge; the trees had spread and bent over the water, and many more water-lily leaves floated on the dark water.

So here you are, thought Peter, deeply moved. Hello to you, lake! Hello, bushes and trees and flowers and sedge. You see I'm back! You've been waiting for me a long time, and I kept dreaming about you, so I came...

With difficulty Peter found what he thought was the clearing where he and his father had kept a fire going almost continually, where they had dried themselves after the rain, and cooked their stew and brewed their tea, and filled their cartridges and sung. But the clearing had shrunk and looked unfamiliar, and he could not make out if it had really become overgrown or if, like almost everything long past, it was larger and more significant in his memory than it had ever been in fact.

Blinking back the tears he felt coming to his eyes, he

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gestured to his son to leave him: "Take a walk along the shore. Have a look over there... Get along with you!"

Alexey looked at his father closely, blushed and went away, his boots rustling through the grass, his thin back hunched.

Peter took off his rucksack, knelt down and ran his hands through the grass. There must be something left, he thought childishly. There was so much ash, and cinders and charcoal. Even a branch of the pine, near the ground, got scorched! He raked through the grass, pushing aside the camomile flowers on their long tough stems, but there was nothing there except the damp ground, the rotting leaves, tiny sticky toadstools, ants scurrying, and wild strawberries trembling like drops of blood. Well, of course, it's the natural cycle of things, Peter thought, confused and unhappy. Everything passes, everything changes... But can it be the same place?

He stood up and looked round. Their hide had been under a fir tree somewhere near here. But where? It had been such a wonderful hide, cool in the daytime and warm at night. He and his father had done a good job. Where was that fir tree? Or had he dreamed the whole thing?

The dense forest rustled its tops and the pale-blue sky shone between them, the aspens flashed the whitish undersides of their leaves, the warm sunlight quivered on the thick dark trunks and below them lay the kingdom of wind-fallen branches and trees, dead birches, seemingly still fresh, and ferns...

Peter crawled under the fir trees, scratching his face and hands, glancing back at the clearing so as not to get too far away. His gun got in his way and he leaned it against a tree. There were a lot of mushrooms and blackberries and the moist mushroom smell drifted in his face together with the dry, sharp smell of pine needles. Absently he picked the unripe blackberries and sucked them, feeling their sour chill in his mouth.

Finally, he came upon an old thick fir tree and, glancing at the clearing and back at the tree, thought it might be the one. The trunk ought to have a notch on it, where it had supported the top of the lean-to. But you could tell nothing from the great bole, thick with layers of resin. He dropped to his knees again, at the foot of the tree, thoughtfully sifting through the mound of dry twigs and needles accumulated over the years, and he found what he was looking for—rotting blackened sticks, their ends showing the cut of an axe. He found more and more of them... Yes. This was all that remained of the fine, strong lean-to—nothing but rotting sticks.

Peter got up, fought his way out of the undergrowth and

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looked up through the leaves at the top of the fir tree. How old it was! How covered in lichen! And the top of it was quite dead . . . Before long, the whole of what had once been a green, furry little sapling would be dry and dead. The way life went by! He found his gun, came out into the clearing and stood staring at the camomile flowers, his mind a blank. Then he remembered how he and his father had signalled to one another. He broke his gun, took out the cartridges, put the barrel to his lips and a long, melancholy call rang out over the woods, dying down across the lake.

"Yo-ho!" came back in a deep boyish voice from quite near.

There was a rustle of footsteps and Alexey appeared with an apologetic face. Peter realised that he hadn't gone anywhere but had sat nearby, waiting for his father to find what he was looking for. "How did you make that noise?" he asked.

Peter showed him and he at once broke his gun and blew with all his might, and again, over a distance of thirty years, the disturbing call rang out over the woods and the lake.

"Well, here's where we are going to live," Peter announced.

"Is it where you and Grandfather lived?" Alexey asked.

"Get the axe, we must put up a lean-to," Peter replied gruffly, digging in his rucksack and not looking at his son.

Cutting the poles for the lean-to, setting them up, driving them in and finally covering the framework with a double layer of fir branches, all this took a long time. Peter remembered everything his father had done and did exactly the same thing, and just as he had once watched his father and remembered, so his son now carefully watched and helped him and remembered what he did.

By the time the lean-to was finished, the rucksacks unpacked and they had spread their jackets and vests on top of the branches for added protection and taken off their boots to rest—it was close on two and it began to look like rain. Dark clouds moved fast, one by one, blotting out the patches of blue sky. The woods darkened and grew silent, and this made it all the cosier inside the shelter. They expected a heavy downpour, but only timid drops came down at first, touching the flowers and leaves, then a fine, warm, steady drizzle.

They sat inside, happily tired, happy that they had set up the lean-to in time, and because of the stillness and the barely audible rustle of the rain on the leaves. Soon everything was damp, but it no longer smelled cleanly and nostalgically of dew as it had that morning, but of mushrooms and wet earth and bitter aspen bark, and the air was a little close.

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Alexey curled up in a corner with his face to the pine tree and was soon asleep. Peter moved closer to the low entrance and watched the dripping, heavy tufts of birch leaves and the daisies hanging their heads in the grass. He sat hugging his knees, as he had often sat before, and sang softly to himself. He sang all the sad old Russian songs he knew—songs of separation, of death, of unrequited love, and of the wide fields and of the anguish of the lonely nights. And as he sang he remembered much about his past, and dreamed of something ravishing and secret, and watched the grey sky and the stilled woods. Then he fell silent; he thought about his son and could not make out if it made him feel mostly joy or envy . . .

Overcome by fatigue, he dozed off after a while, his head on his knees, but his feeling of longing and regret for something for ever lost stayed with him, even in his sleep. His arm hung down and went numb, feeling as if it were dead. And the rain went on drizzling and rustling in the aspen leaves and in the grass, and everything grew wetter and wetter until only under the fir tree, inside the lean-to, was it dry.

They woke up towards evening; the rain had stopped and they picked up their guns and went out into the dripping woods. Big drops dribbled off the branches, you could hear them from a distance—*tuk-tuk-tuk*. The sun was setting, its weak yellow light coming through the trees. The woods were filled with a transparent gold mist; the birds were finishing their songs for the day. The same golden vapour hung over the lake, the reeds and bushes shone like pearls and the water stirred faintly: somewhere on it there were ducks.

"Wait—let me," Alexey pleaded in a whisper.

Peter moved aside and at once remembered asking his father the same thing and his father often giving way. Alexey put his gun across a bough and took aim; his shoulderblades twitched. *Takh-tiukh-tookh!*—the echo scattered widely and a puff of smoke blew out over the water.

No longer cautious, they pushed their way through the bushes, branches crackling under their feet, and reached the shore in time to see three ducks making off across the lake. Two were left in the water. One lay still, its yellow belly showing, the other wobbled on its side, trying to dive but only managing to dip its head, its wings quivering. The smoke from the gun, mixing with the haze, spread like a sheet over the water.

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"Wait, we'll cut a branch," Peter said in a worried voice, unslinging his gun and getting the axe.

But Alexey wasn't listening. Frowning, keeping his eye on the duck which was still thrashing, tensely living the experience of his first shot, he pulled off his boots, waggled his feet, shook off his puttees and took off his clothes. Peter meekly put down his axe, sat down on a rotting log and lit a cigarette.

Naked, his long lean body quivering and soon covered with gooseflesh, Alexey got into the water. He stepped in cautiously, gently feeling the bottom, pushing the water-lily stems out of his way, but after a moment he jumped in impatiently and swam out. Reaching the duck, he turned a radiant face to Peter.

"Father!" he shouted, gasping from the shock of the cold water. "Get in! Have a swim! There's a wonderful smell of smoke! Hydrogen and tobacco..." He dived, churned the water with his feet, came up, snorting and spluttering and swam back, pushing the duck in front of him.

And Peter felt a chill down his spine as he suddenly remembered shooting a duck on just such an evening on a lake about a mile away from this one, and swimming after it, while his father sat smoking on the bank, while the smoke from the shot and the cigarette spread over the water with such a wonderful, exciting smell that he, too, had shouted to his father and dived and splashed with joy.

Yes, it was exactly as it had been... And life was as good as ever, and always would be—there would always be flaming sunsets, turning to crimson, then green, and gently kindling dawns, and the flowers would blossom and the grass grow, and new people come to the same places to shoot...

His heart thumped with joy and sadness. Unable to sit still any longer, he threw away his cigarette and went off across the wet grass into the still, dark woods.

Alexey stayed on a long time, loudly smacking the water with his hands, calling out in different voices and listening to the echo, looking at the mysterious far shore, already veiled by the blue mist of the dying day. Finally he got out, blue and shivering and dressed quickly, hopping on one foot. He stroked the warm duck with its wet feet, its half-shut turquoise eyes and the drops of blood on its bill, noticed a half-smoked cigarette on the ground and, glancing around furtively, smoked it, coughing and rolling his eyes as he pulled at it, and smiled in his untarnished happiness.

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Translated from the Russian by Manya Harari and Andrew Thomson

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WILLIAM SAROYAN

Lover's Leap

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THE little girl had always insisted on having him hold her hand whenever they walked. It was a small hand, like her mother's, only smaller. As they walked, the little girl's hand would speak. He would feel a sudden intense pressure, and notice that a very stylish woman was approaching. As the woman drew nearer, the little hand would press many times, quickly. He would tighten his hold on the hand until it relaxed.

But soon he would feel the sudden pressure again, look about, and there in a small tree would be a small bird. The little girl would stop to watch the bird. If the bird happened to change its position, the little girl's hand would press again quickly. If it chirped, the little girl's hand would press many times—if it sang, the hand sang, too.

Now and then they came upon somebody unfortunate—an old man wasted away, or an old woman in black rags poking about in a dustbin. The little girl's hand pressed only once, and the pressure remained.

On walks when she'd been little, she'd soon asked to be carried, sometimes putting the wish into words, sometimes stopping and reaching up. She'd always been a lively little thing, alert, watchful and quick.

When she'd been an infant barely able to walk, she'd taken to fighting bed and sleep, rocking in her crib on hands and knees, banging her head against the headboard. After five or ten minutes of that, she climbed over the top, down the side, and came trotting into the living room. If she was taken straight back and put down again, she never wept, but they would soon hear her rocking and knocking again.

"It hurts," he would say. "She's so earnest when she comes trotting out like some little creature from another world. She can't tell us what's eating her. She expects us to understand. And we're not doing it. We don't understand her."

"We understand her," Laura would say. "Tell her to stop. If she doesn't, go in there and spank her."

"Are you crazy? You don't *spank* little creatures. You love them."

"You're a writer. You're always writing. She's asking for a spanking, and if *you* don't spank her, I *will*."

"The hell you will. We haven't got anything better to do than love her."

"Rosey! Stop rocking! Or I'm going to come in there and give you a spanking!"

The rocking would stop. There would be silence for half a minute. Then the rocking and knocking would start again. The

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mother would get to her feet. The father would take her arm.

"Leave her alone. If we don't understand her, let's not *punish* her."

"She's taking advantage, and she *knows* she is. Not of *me*—I'm only her mother. She's taking advantage of you—because you're a man, and she knows she can get away with it."

The rocking would stop as their voices grew louder.

"She enjoys these loud arguments, too. She's listening to this one right now. She's giving another woman a bad time—her own mother. Rosey! Go to sleep."

They'd stop arguing. The place would be silent a moment or two, and then the rocking and knocking would start all over again.

"Well, let her knock her brains out, then, if that's what you want her to do," the mother would say.

"I should think you'd be happy to love her when she needs love."

They'd always had arguments about Rosey. Sometimes he was sure Laura was mistaken, sometimes he was sure she wasn't, but most of the time he just didn't know. He only knew that he loved her, that everything about her enchanted and troubled him. "Who can be the father of a woman?"

He'd always understood the boy, because the boy was himself again. The boy had revealed to the father the father's worst flaws. When the boy said *now*, he meant now, and if it couldn't be now, he went into a rage.

One afternoon he'd walked into the boy's bedroom, where his mother had sent him for anger and rudeness. He found the boy walking around the room, touching or pointing at things, and cursing them. The floor, the wall, the ceiling, the bed, the bureau, the glass of the window, the yard beyond, the sky, the clouds, the sun.

What he'd wanted that time was to be taken to the zoo, to have another look at the fellows there, for he had in fact taken the animals for people, but his mother had asked some friends in, so of course he couldn't go, couldn't be taken. At the zoo an earlier day, Van had spoken to the kangaroo that had run to the wire fence. He'd offered it bread from the bag he'd brought along. The young kangaroo had stood upright, its short front legs like arms, its feet like hands, the fingers moving, but the kangaroo hadn't accepted the slice of stale bread.

"Go ahead," the boy had said. "Take it. It's good." To demonstrate this, he took a big bite out of the bread, and he stood solemnly chewing it.

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At last he said, "What's the matter? Doesn't he like me?"

Van had never been difficult, and Rosey never easy, because she was a girl, a woman, her mother's daughter, another order of creature entirely, a member of another race—a lovely, irresistible, unaccountable, enchanting, and difficult race.

Now, on Fifth Avenue, in the Saturday sunshine, he walked with the wild little woman, the luminous little creature of long ago, the sigher of tragic infant sighs, the rollicking laugher at vast and secret jokes. He walked with a young lady now, a straight little girl with a long thin face and big dark eyes, a girl almost ten now—a witty but always earnest little girl, who loved banter and play, memories and arguments, and nice clothes.

On the first day of October in New York, on Fifth Avenue between Sixty-sixth and Sixty-fifth, for a moment he hadn't a care in the world. He was immortal, as he'd always believed he *might* some day be. He loved everything and everybody, because he was holding the hand of his daughter and they were walking together in the world. He loved her tenderly, whoever she was: whoever she was from him and his own unknown truth, whoever she was from her mother and her unknown truth. For whoever Rosey was, she *was* love, and now for a moment this love was near. It moved to him steadily from the little hand he held, and there was healing in it.

He forgot the hole in his jaw, with the medicine-soaked dressing in it. He forgot the taste of ether in his mouth, the pain at the back of his head, the deafness of his right ear, the everlasting hissing there. He forgot the fat of the troubled years that had swarmed over muscle and bone. He forgot his chronic speed, impatience, irritability, arrogance, anger, rudeness, his compulsion to be for ever involved in works, in the making of something. He forgot his debts, his poverty, his losses, and the dead of his family. He forgot the mad of his family, and the dead and mad among his friends. He forgot everything but love—the love that flowed from his daughter's hand into his own.

He jumped suddenly—one, two, the feet treading air.

The little girl stopped. She drew her hand away.

"I didn't know you could do *that*."

"Of course I can do it."

"Do it again."

He did it again.

"What *is* it, Papa?"

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"Well, it's what the Armenians call 'The Lover's Leap.' It was learned from the wild goats of the mountains of Nairi."

He was about to do it again when the girl said quickly, "Not now, Papa. Somebody's watching."

He saw the young policeman at the corner. He did the leap as the girl stamped in protest.

"You're not afraid of a policeman, are you?" he said.

"No, Papa," she whispered, "but he doesn't *know* you. He'll think you're crazy."

He took her hand again, and they walked past the young cop, who winked and nodded, while Rosey tried to hide.

When they were across the street, she looked back. "He doesn't *know* you, Papa."

"He doesn't *have* to know me."

"He doesn't know you're the greatest writer in the world."

"*What?*"

"Oh, I *know*, Papa. I didn't used to, but I do *now*. Miss Effinan told me."

"Good for her."

"She knows everything."

"No doubt."

"She's read *everything* you've ever written. But a *policeman* on a street corner, what does *he* know? You do 'The Lover's Leap' like that, like the wild goats do, and he's *got* to think you're crazy." She looked around again, and then she said very softly and very quickly, "Do it again."

He did it again.

Rosey laughed, and then she did the leap. "It's very good," she said. "But we don't have it in ballet class."

"Oh? You're going to dancing school, are you?"

"Not dancing school. *Ballet* classes. In Carnegie Hall. My teacher danced in ballet all over the world. Madame Totovskaya."

"Do you enjoy the classes?"

"*Enjoy* them? All I *think* about is when I'll get my ballet shoes. Do you know how long Madame Totovskaya had to take ballet lessons before they gave her her shoes?"

"Two years?"

"*Six*. Because they were in Russia, and you know how *they* are. Madame Totovskaya says I can have my shoes just as soon as my legs are strong enough for me to start practising toe dancing."

"That'll be the day."

"I'll say."

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"I'll be very proud when you're dancing on your toes."

"So will Mama. She said so. But I hope I don't have to wait too long. How strong do my legs have to *be*? Do you know, Papa?"

"Well, no, I *don't*, as a matter of fact. I happen to know —or at any rate, *believe*—your legs are quite strong right *now*, but that is something Madame . . . understands."

"Totovskaya."

"Yes. As soon as you're ready, she'll let you have your shoes, I'm sure."

"How *do* legs *get* strong?"

"I'm not sure. I suppose a *number* of things are involved. First, your health has got to be good, and I believe yours is. Then, you've got to *keep* it good. That means you've got to eat plenty of good food, and get plenty of rest and sleep. And then, of course, you've got to practise."

"Would you like to come to one of my classes sometime?"

"*Would* I!"

"Mondays and Fridays at four, room 516, Carnegie Hall."

"I'll be there on Monday."

"*Really*, Papa? Don't you have a lot of other things to do?"

"Oh, I'll put *them* aside. I'll be there at four, I'll stay until the class is over, and then I'll take you and Mama to Rumpelmayer's for tea."

"Mama doesn't take me. Miss MacDougal does."

"Of course. Mama's working. I'll take you and Miss MacDougal to tea."

"No, let's ditch *her*, Papa."

"Oh, no, we don't want to do that. I like her, don't you?"

"Sure I like her. She taught me to knit."

"She *did*?"

"Oh, yes. I've knitted all kinds of things for my dolls. Would you like me to knit something for *you*?"

"I certainly would."

"All right. I'll knit you something. What would you like?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"A cap for when it snows?"

"*Would* you?"

"It might take a long time."

"That's all right."

"Would you like red?"

"Best of all."

"A red cap for the snow, then."

"Thank you very much."

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"I haven't *knitted* it yet, Papa."

"Thank you for *planning* to knit it."

"Oh."

"Now. Where shall we go?"

"Oh, let's just walk. Is that all right?"

"I love to walk."

"It'll make my legs strong."

"Your legs *are* strong."

"I can't wait to get my ballet shoes."

"That may be entirely a matter of time, and you just can't rush time. You've got to wait, that's all."

"I *can't* wait. I want to put on my ballet shoes and dance the way I've seen Madame Totovskaya dance. She's old, but she's still very light, and when she dances the way she used to in ballet, it's very beautiful. She must be fifty."

"Is that so?"

"I *think* so. She talks about dancing long ago."

"I can't wait to meet her."

"You'll like her. She's like a little girl."

"How many of you are there?"

"Sometimes six, sometimes five, but *sometimes* I'm the only one there. I haven't missed one class yet, and all the others have. Madame Totovskaya gives me my lesson for a whole hour just the same."

"I like her."

"She's *really* nice, but when we do something wrong—oh, boy, watch out!"

"What happens?"

"She stops the piano player. That's her nephew, but he's an old man. I guess he's even older than you are, Papa. Then she just looks at whoever's done something wrong, and she just waits. Then she does the movement herself, the way it *ought* to be done. Then she nods at her nephew—Michael. He starts playing again, and we start practising again."

"I'm not old."

Rosey giggled. "Oh, Papa, you're old—old—old! When you married Mama, you were seventeen years older than she was. *Seventeen years,* Papa! How could you do it?"

"That's a tradition in my family. But I'm not *old.* I'm forty-seven."

"Oh, no, Papa, *you're* not old. Not *much*!"

"Well, I certainly don't *feel* old. I feel young. I feel rich."

"*Rich?*"

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"Very."

"Do you have any money *at all*?"

"Of course I have money."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Oh, Papa, that's a lot of money."

"Unfortunately, every penny of it is going to the government."

"Why?"

"Taxes."

"How much do you owe 'em?"

"Well, at the last reckoning it was around fifty thousand."

"*Dollars?*"

"Yes."

"Who are they, Papa?"

"The tax collectors? The tax collectors are the tax collectors, period."

"Let's kill 'em."

"Shall we?"

"Yes, they're so selfish. They want all your money for their old government."

"They sure do."

They walked on down Fifth Avenue.

He thought, I hope I'm permitted to remember this moment some day . . .

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ANSWERS TO TENNIS QUIZ ON PAGE 99

1. Hans Redl.
2. 1959.
3. The Men's Doubles Championship, in partnership with Frank Parker.
4. Five are singles and two are doubles.
5. (a) Michael Davies, (b) Bobby Wilson.
6. Gertrude Augusta Moran of the USA.
7. False. Australian left-hander Norman Brookes won the Wimbledon Singles twice before then—in 1907 and 1914.
8. (a) 1958, (b) 1955, (c) 1961.
9. Jan Erik Lundquist.
10. The Mixed Doubles—in 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956.
11. Doris Hart of the USA, in July, 1951.
12. (d)—in January, 1957.

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Book Reviews

by FRED MAJDALANY

IF the Cold War did not exist, it would have been necessary to invent it, as Voltaire more or less said of God. This is looking at it, of course, from the somewhat narrow point of view of writers of fiction. The division of the world into a convenient and seemingly permanent Us and Them, has created for the novelist at all levels a perfect basic situation, background and context, capable of infinite dramatic permutation; and a timely extension of the real or "hot" war themes that, understandably, have dominated British, American and European fiction for most of the past twenty-five years.

The Cold War is an extreme example of an ill wind's inability to stop itself blowing *somebody* some good. However reprehensible it may be to everyone else, to professional storytellers great and small who feel a vocation to divert their fellow citizens with mystery, terror, horror, shock and suspense, it has been a wonderful, and indeed indispensable, boon. The *demi-guerre* that is its end product, has given a new lease of life to the thriller, the adventure story, the novel of suspense. The International P.E.N. should appoint an annual day of thanksgiving for it.

The Berlin Wall is of course its arch-symbol, and it is proper that the one near-classic of the *genre* to date—John Le Carré's "The Spy Who Came In From the Cold"—should be a sort of black memorial to the Wall.

No-one with an ounce of sensibility can fail to dig the Wall: but you dig it better if you've seen it in close-up and have undergone the tragi-comic rigmarole of a crossing through Checkpoint Charlie and have heard, as I have, a West Berlin newspaperman complain of overwork, investigating an average of three or four stories a day as "Wall Correspondent" of his evening paper. Le Carré's beautifully constructed, sparely-written novel, with its undertone of tragic inevitability and controlled despair, is the Wall's threnody and, as such, is unlikely to be bettered.

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I could never, myself, get on with Fleming, the pioneer. Not merely because the subsequent cult of Bond has seemed to me bogus, but because of the way the books were written: I found the name-dropping tough-smart Daily Express-ese hard to take. I believe the Bond stories have found their logical fulfilment in their movie versions from which they emerge as a kind of rich man's slapstick: for laughs only.

Anyway, spying in its current guise—Clausewitz, if still alive, would undoubtedly have defined it as "a continuation of diplomacy by other means"—seems to be here to stay, as we used to say of television. The question is—what next for the authors to whom it has become big business? There are signs that being funny may be the new thing. "The Russian Interpreter," the recent novel by the humorous writer Michael Frayn, was one notable symptom of laughter beginning to get into the act. I, for one, am not displeased. Man cannot live by dread alone—even in the unsmiling context of the Cold War.

COLD WAR HIGH-JINKS

The impression that being funny may be a growing trend in this field, is further supported by *Tree Frog* (Heinemann, 18s.), a brilliantly readable first novel by Martin Woodhouse, an author in his early thirties. Dr. Woodhouse has come to spy fiction via the sublime of Medical School and the spit and gorblimey of the television serial. Both disciplines have served him well. He has come up with the most intelligent, as well as the most amusing, light entertainment that I have come across in book form for some time.

Tree Frog is the code-name of a secret British pilotless reconnaissance aircraft, designed to be launched at 11,000 feet from the belly of a carrier aircraft, and thereafter guided and controlled by ground radar. Dr. Giles Yeoman, the "I" of the story, is the young scientist whose technical expertise has made possible the vital radar installation embodied in the plane. His interest in the project is purely scientific and his main concern is to persuade his department to buy him a computer. To his surprise and increasing consternation and annoyance, he is tricked by his smooth Civil-Service bosses into being a part of something perilously like a Secret-Service operation. In his innocence, he becomes involved in Iron Curtain skulduggery in Austria, from which he emerges bloody but unbowed and more defiantly insistent than ever that he is a scientist not a hero. But almost at once he finds he's the centrepiece of a terrifying

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technical experiment in the Libyan Desert, devised by the same secret department to which he appears to have become irrevocably seconded. This brings the book to its second action climax and one that is unlikely to escape the notice of film-makers.

Dr. Woodhouse handles his tensions and excitements with a deft skill that keeps the story on the move at an exhilarating pace. But what gives *Tree Frog* its special flavour is the throwaway humour of the author's approach: the jaunty humour of the fighter-pilot, but articulate, too. The Civil Service, the mumbo-jumbo of scientific research and administration, the idiosyncratic ways of the RAF, are lightly teased with a deadpan economy of words. Even more deadpan (if you can have degrees of it), is the slight love interest. The girl is a *jolie laide* concerned with statistics (scientific, not vital) and never a tender word is allowed to sully the monosyllabic, but apparently splendid, relationship between the scientist-hero and herself.

ARABIAN POT-POURRI

In *Journey to Orassia* (W. H. Allen, 21s.), by Alan Caillou, we are concerned not with the Cold War, but that other background that can be relied upon to provide all the violence and exoticism a story-teller needs—the Middle East. Orassia is a small kingdom on the Persian Gulf whose reactionary ruler hopes to make himself as rich as some of the neighbouring oil sheikhs with the aid of an American oil tycoon with whom he has concluded a deal to arrange trial borings below Orassia's shore. The tycoon's large, specially-adapted yacht is to be the off-shore headquarters and workshop of the boring operation, which duly becomes complicated by involvement in one of those military *coups d'état* that ensure there is never a dull moment in Arab politics.

Mr. Caillou, a British writer who now lives in California, has written the kind of colourful action story that seems to cast the film version of itself as it goes along. But indoor action being as essential as outdoor at the present time, the sex is injected under pressure as mechanically as the other contrived excitements. The tycoon is not only the stock rich bullyboy who buys up all human beings he needs or who stand in his way—he has to be a manic collector of pornography and erotica. His spoiled neglected daughter is both a lush *and* a nympho. The half-Arabian *éminence grise* of the Arab ruler is presented as an intellectual lady of great distinction, who

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talks and thinks like an Oxford-educated Middle East delegate to the United Nations—but the James Stewart-type young oil-man assisting the tycoon manages also to find in her the qualities of a super sexpot.

I suspect that Mr. Caillou has planned directly for Hollywood and in due course the book will find itself rather more than a B feature, something less than an A feature—in fact, an alpha minus feature.

argosy bookshelf

Journalist and TV commentator James Mossman has now turned his hand to fiction. In his first novel, *Beggars on Horseback*, he draws an intriguing picture of a Middle Eastern capital in the throes of political upheaval. At the centre of the intrigue stands the British Embassy. Simon Mulloch is one of its staff and, as a young, keen innocent, he finds it almost impossible to adjust to the pace of the revolution and the conflicting loyalties that are forced upon him. Meanwhile, life goes merrily on in The Marouf (the Middle Eastern kingdom in question), and diplomats and their wives, revolutionaries and some pretty shady characters, work, love and go about their business—usually at one or another's expense.

(Bodley Head, 21s.)

The Suspended Drawing Room, by S. N. Behrman, is a collection of many different things—profiles of Robert Sherwood and Ferenc Molnar; two chapters about wartime England; a definitive piece on George Bernard Shaw, and a very funny chapter all about an eccentric uncle of Elia Kazan's. S. N. Behrman is an American who first became famous for his profiles in the New Yorker magazine: the book is dedicated to the late Harold Ross, founder and editor of the magazine. Also, the preface of the book is mostly about Harold Ross and, in many ways, it is the best section of the book. Behrman claims that everything that has been written about Ross, including James Thurber's book, has been wide of the mark and that some day he, Behrman, will write one that will be the last word on the great man. This, one hopes, will be more interesting than much of *The Suspended Drawing Room*.

(Hamish Hamilton, 25s.)

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Donald MacKenzie's new crime story, *Salute From a Dead Man,* is set entirely in London. But MacKenzie's London is the seat of corruption and international intrigue. The hero is a man who leaves jail with good intentions of keeping out of trouble. Unfortunately, he consents to take care of a package and gets involved in some hair-raising adventures.

(Hodder & Stoughton, 16s.)

John Gunn, an Australian writer, was to all intents and purposes a contented man. He was married, with six children. He had a quiet suburban routine and a job with the Australian Broadcasting Commission. But John Gunn had a dream—and a taste for freedom and adventure. He also wanted to find out if Suburban Man could break out for long enough to taste that freedom and adventure.

He decided to make a 3,000-mile voyage to the Great Barrier Reef. He was no handyman, but he built his own 35-foot trimaran, and although he had never been to sea in a small boat, he sailed through the dangerous Tasman Sea with a crew of three and his two eldest sons, aged nine and seven.

Barrier Reef by Trimaran is John Gunn's chronicle of that adventurous trip. But more than that, it is a factual account of the problems he had to face and contains valuable information for anyone with a similar dream in mind. (Collins, 25s.)

Jennifer Dawson won the James Tait Black Prize in 1961 for her first novel. Then, in 1963, she won the Cheltenham Festival Prize for her second book.

In her new novel, *The Cold Country,* she deals with some misfits of society. Dickie, her main character, is the illegitimate son of a Cabinet Minister and a deranged mother. To escape his background, Dickie latches on to some dilapidated bohemians who are anything but pillars of society. And so on . . . and on . . . and on. (Anthony Blond, 25s.)

A Few Nights and Days is a first novel by a twenty-nine-year-old African writer, Mbella Sonne Dipoko, from Cameroon. The few nights and days of the title cover a crisis in the lives of four students living and working in Paris. They spend much of their time together—in cafés, out dancing, or in one another's rooms. The book is notable because of its freshness—particularly in the attitudes shown by this African writer to European customs, family life, love and morality.

(Longmans, 21s.)

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Michael Halliday's new thriller, *Wicked as the Devil,* is a good old-fashioned mixture of unpredictable and nightmarish events. There are no spies and no agents—just three sisters who share uneventful, spinster lives until one falls in love and marries.

This triggers off a train of events which throws the sisters into the centre of a nation-wide murder hunt. Disaster is averted, however, by Chief Inspector Webster—of course.

(Hodder & Stoughton, 16s.)

Games People Play, by Eric Berne, MD, is supposedly about the psychology of human relationships. Dr. Berne is an American, and claims that people tend to live their lives consistently playing certain "games" in their "interpersonal relationships." The reasons for this? To avoid confronting reality; to conceal ulterior motives; to rationalise their activities; to avoid actual participation.

Dr. Berne offers an analysis of thirty-six "games," which he categorises under seven headings: life games, marital games, sexual games, party games, underworld games, consulting-room games and good games.

It is noticeable that no-one ever seems to win any of the games! (André Deutsch, 21s.)

Edmund Crispin has edited *Best Tales of Terror,* a paperback anthology of disturbing stories contributed by Ray Bradbury, Evelyn Waugh, Elizabeth Jane Howard, L. P. Hartley, John Collier and others.

It is a collection of very gripping stories that are not morbid, but a mixture of orthodox ghost stories and science fiction, plus a bit of crime. (Faber & Faber, 6s. 6d.)

This is the centenary year of the birth of H. G. Wells, and to celebrate it, Brian Aldiss has written a brilliant novella entitled *The Saliva Tree.* This won first prize in a ballot held by Science Fiction Writers of America. But to round out *The Saliva Tree,* Mr. Aldiss has also included nine of his short stories, which make up a collection of science fiction and fantasy at their best. (Faber & Faber, 18s.)

Strictly A Loser, by Edna Sherry, is a psychological thriller which leads the reader step by step through all the details of a perfectly-plotted and perfectly-executed murder.

(Hodder & Stoughton, 16s.)

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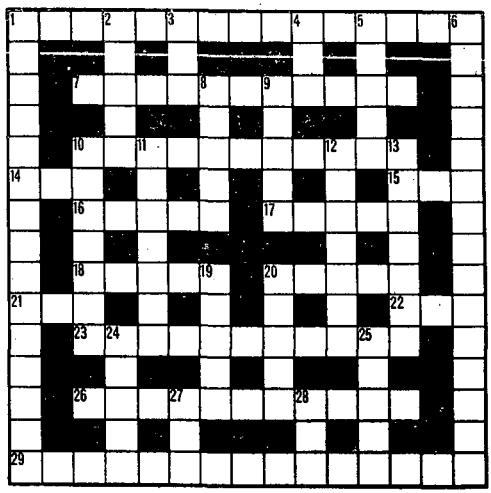
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 House-proud Parisians? (6-9).

7 Going Mod? Ornate get up! (4, 7).

10 Trial marriages which end in ashes? (4, 7).

14 Rook's repartee (3).

15 Lettuce from Stanchio (3).

16 Inside a smashed train (5).

17 Done by candlelight? (5).

18 Replay those notes, with modulations! (5).

20 Halley's, perhaps (5).

21 Curious town in Kent (3).

22 Track—to boredom? (3).

23 Testing ground—for plant variety? (6, 5).

26 This cone means trouble! (5, 6).

29 Depression on the sea-bed? (4, 2, 3, 6).

DOWN

1 Makes money from thin air? (9, 6).

2 No crook wants to escape through this loophole! (5).

3 Concealed in French idol (3).

4 Small, but positively loaded! (3).

5 A swinging attachment (5).

6 These are wretched glasses! (5, 10).

8 African tree-snake (5).

9 Tries confused ceremonies (5).

10 Turning swindler? (7).

11 Diabolical (7).

12 Some suspender! (7).

13 Office staff? (7).

19 "Don't you think ——spoils romance at sea?" (Kipling) (5).

20 A royal barker (5).

24 Frequently found in waterproof tent (5).

25 Clutch at a sprag! (5).

27 A length of twine, in strands (3).

28 Rove, by Jove! (3).

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